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MAY 2005

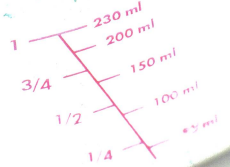
CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

Tests
FRIDGES
51 cm TVS
ALL-IN-ONE PRINTERS
BLOOD PRESSURE MONITORS

GOOD-VALUE WASHING

36 laundry detergents on test



GET FAT QUICK?

Watch those coffees!

ST JOHN'S WORT

Are you getting what you pay for?

COMING SOON ...

GSM phones

More new phones, with and without a camera.

Spaghetti

Do different brands taste different?

Microwave ovens ...

... for small families or small kitchens.

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EMAIL us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au

Not amused...

Jane Mackenzie, Editor

Several things in this issue of CHOICE annoyed (or surprised) me.

I'm annoyed that health insurance premiums have gone up again (see page 22). The average increase of 8% this year is bad enough, but when you look back at increases over the past 10 years they compound to a staggering total of 71% — way beyond the inflation rate in that time. Whatever arguments the health insurance companies make to account for this, it points to either an inefficient or a greedy industry.

I've wasted far more money than I care to think of paying for health insurance, but worse still taxpayers' money is now being wasted on it, in the form of the 30% rebate. How much longer can this country afford to go on propping up this industry?

Still in the medical line, it's great that St John's wort is now considered to be effective as an alternative to conventional medicine to treat mild depression. What's annoying is that if you decide to try it, you won't be able to tell from the labels on most products whether what's in the bottle bears any relation to a product that's been shown to work in clinical trials (see page 14).

In fact, although companies supplying herbal remedies like St John's wort are obliged by the Therapeutic Goods Administration to hold evidence of their product's effectiveness, when we asked them to show it to us, the results were very mixed in terms of the evidence being satisfactory. How are we supposed to put our trust in a product when even the TGA lets it onto the market without examining its effectiveness?

As for what surprised me, horrified might be more accurate. Have you any idea how many calories there might be in that iced-choc-frappa-coffee you treat yourself to every day? Find out on page 19. You'll probably be as freaked out as I was.

FOR MEMBERS ONLY

www.CHOICEextra.com.au

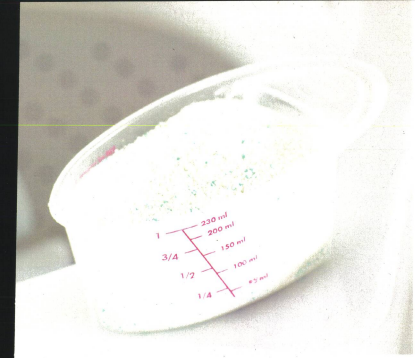
The free website exclusive to CHOICE magazine personal subscribers, with a four-year index and links to many articles online.

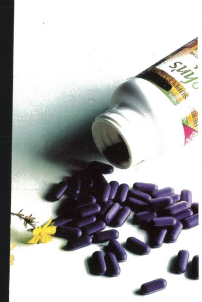
Look out for the symbol in magazine articles — it indicates there's extra info on CHOICEextra. This month you'll find our interactive 'Compare-a-Product' tool to help you choose a fridge that suits you. To use this free website you'll need to log in with your subscriber number, which is the number directly above your name on the mailing label that comes with the magazine.

CHOICE SHOPPER best value

All you need is the model name and number you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine). CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only.

Call 1300 360 655





4

29

19

CONTENTS

May 2005

COVER STORY

11 **Laundry detergents**
How to get a good, cheap wash for both top and front loaders.
Photo: Masterfile

REPORTS

14 **St John's wort**
There's evidence it can treat mild depression, but you can't be certain of buying an effective product.

TESTS

8 **Honey**
CHOICE's Home Testers found some tasty cheap honeys.

19 **Coffee and cake to go?**
You'll be amazed (horrified?) how much fat, sugar and calories are in those cappa-, frappa-, mocha-thingies.

23 **Multifunction printers**
Print, copy, scan, fax all in one machine? Yes — but with some compromises.

29 **Blood pressure monitors**
Machines to check your blood pressure at home.

34 **51 cm TVs**
Even in these days of widescreen, plasma and LCD, this size of TV is still the workhorse in many homes.

39 **Time for a new fridge?**
There are lots of energy-efficient new models on the market — but they weren't all without problems in our test.

REGULARS

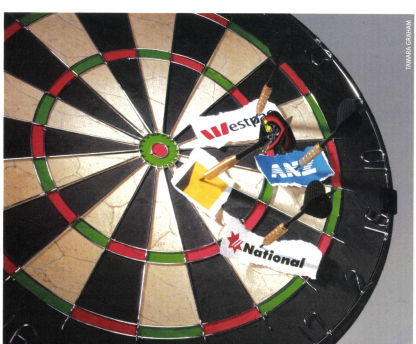
4 CHOICE Cuts
7 Your Letters
22 Hip Pocket: Health insurance price rise; credit card as fashion accessory
28 Food Bites: Finding the best teabag; sugary 'natural' soft drinks
46 Consumer Bookshelf
49 Recalls and bans
51 CHOICE index: June 2004 — May 2005
52 The Hard Word

PRICE RISE

Due to increasing costs, the price of CHOICE subscription is going up. The new prices, effective from the August 2005 issue, will be:

- Personal subscribers: quarterly $17.25, one year $69, two years $128.
- Institution/company subscribers: one year $110, two years $210.
- CHOICE plus CHOICE Online: quarterly $26.75.
- Voting membership: $98.70 per year.

If you've subscribed within the last year, the price you pay will be held constant for your first year.



TAMARA GRAHAM

'Big Four' banks still don't satisfy customers

CHOICE *Money & Rights*' latest bank satisfaction results show again that if you bank with one of the 'Big Four' you're likely to be less satisfied than if you're with a smaller bank, building society or credit union.

2807 subscribers took part in the survey, which asked about satisfaction with everyday transaction accounts, credit cards and home loans. Overall 20% reported being disappointed with their bank accounts or credit cards, 15% were unhappy with their home loan, and 21% had made a complaint to their financial institution in the past year.

The main reasons for disappointment were:

- High fees.
- Interest rates (too high on credit cards and home loans, too low on bank accounts).
- Poor customer service.
- Home loan mistakes made by the financial institution.

Credit unions were clearly the best at keeping their customers satisfied, compared with all other institutions. Customers liked their credit union for low fees and good customer service across all three financial products.

On the other hand, respondents dealing with the four biggest banks (**ANZ, COMMONWEALTH, NATIONAL** and **WESTPAC**) were less happy across all three product areas, particularly for bank accounts and credit cards. Customers of the Big Four and other banks were also significantly more likely to have made a complaint than credit union customers.

Disappointingly, even when respondents were unhappy with their financial institution, they seemed reluctant to change their transaction account and credit card. Inertia seems to have a lot to do with this: the most cited reason for having an account with one of the Big Four banks was, "I've always dealt with them."

CHOICE *Money & Rights* has made it easier to change bank accounts with its free website, **www.flickyourbank.com.au**. It'll help you find a new account that suits you, and lead you through all the steps it takes to swap accounts.

The April/May issue of CHOICE *Money & Rights* gives more survey results. To subscribe call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.

THANK YOU

The Australian Consumers' Association (the publisher of CHOICE) is a non-profit organisation funded solely by the sales of CHOICE and our other products. So we're always very grateful when subscribers give us a donation to help in our work for consumers.

When the donation is particularly generous we like to thank the donors publicly. Our thanks, therefore, to our life member Dr J H Hirshman of Vaucluse, NSW, for his recent generous contribution to the Consumers' Association's work.

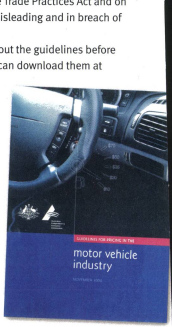
Truth in advertising?

'Drive away, no more to pay' — can you rely on phrases like this when you're buying a car, or can you expect hidden extras? Because the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) receives many complaints every year about the way car prices are advertised, it has produced, in consultation with the motor vehicle industry and other stakeholders, the *Guidelines for pricing in the motor vehicle industry*.

The handy 24-page booklet addresses many issues of concern to businesses and consumers, such as bait advertising, cash rebates and cash-back offers, advertising discount prices, the use of disclaimers in pricing, pictorial representations and cost or below cost advertising.

The guide provides basic, practical information — it's not a statement of the law — and gives the ACCC's views plus examples, both on what must be done to comply with the Trade Practices Act and on practices that may be misleading and in breach of the Act.

If you want to check out the guidelines before you next buy a car, you can download them at www.accc.gov.au (type 'motor vehicle industry' in the search box). A printed version is available for $10 from the ACCC; phone 1300 302 502.



Spread the word

Trans fat can increase your risk of heart disease and, weight for weight, is thought to be more harmful to health than saturated fat, so it's worth trying to avoid it. For more on trans fat, see the article in the April 2005 issue of CHOICE.

Generally information on the level of trans fat in processed foods is hard to get, as food manufacturers aren't required to include it on labels. CHOICE helped by listing the trans fat levels found in some spreads in our Jan/Feb 2005 issue. However, we want to see the current labelling situation change.

Not surprisingly, the **HEART FOUNDATION** is championing the same cause with its well-known tick. Companies have to pay for the tick to appear on their food, but in order to be able to carry it, the product also has to meet certain nutrition criteria. In the case of spreads, choosing one with a tick will guarantee you a low level of trans fat: by the end of this year, trans fat will be a maximum of 1% of the total fat in all spreads carrying the tick.

NATIONAL HEART FOUNDATION · APPROVED · CERT TM

Bear in mind, though, that if your regular brand of spread doesn't carry a tick, it could just be that the manufacturer has chosen not to pay for it — so it's still worth checking labels for trans fat and comparing products if it's listed.

For other ways of minimising the amount of trans fat you eat, see the article in the April issue.

Printing from camera phones

One of the potential benefits of having a mobile phone with a built-in digital camera is that you've always got a camera on hand for those magic moments. But if you want to experience the magic for more than a moment, you might consider getting a print made. What are your options?

- **OPTUS** and **FUJIFILM** have teamed up to offer prints directly from your phone — you send the photo to the print service by MMS (multimedia messaging service) and pay $2 per print. The cost includes postage, and is charged to your mobile phone bill (or deducted from your prepaid balance). You can also place orders via the website, which is cheaper if you have several prints: costs are 45 cents per print and $1.55 per order for postage.
- **KODAK** offers a mobile service that allows you to upload photos by MMS to the **KODAK** website. From there you can organise prints, or create an 'album' that can be accessed by your friends and family. Prints cost 80 cents each (or 59 cents for more than 30) and postage costs $1.99 — or you can organise to pick them up at a **KODAK** outlet near you.
- Wireless technology allows you to use **photo printing kiosks** in photo shops, pharmacies and variety stores. Simply point your Bluetooth or infrared-capable phone at it and upload the image. You can then edit, enhance and print your photo. Many also accept mobile phone memory cards such as Secure Digital (SD).
- **At-home options** include buying a purpose-designed photo printer (you can even get one specifically for camera phones), or transferring data from your phone to your computer, where you can use a web-based printing service or print from your regular printer. To upload the images for printing, options include wireless communications, a docking device, memory card reader or USB cable — something for everyone, it seems.

ULF KRISMANN

But before you throw away your so-yesterday digital camera and rely solely on your mobile phone for pics, be warned that the picture quality won't be as good as you're used to.

Most mobile phones have around 0.3 megapixel resolution, with the best currently around 1 megapixel. To get a really good-quality 10 x 15 cm print, you'd usually need around 2 megapixels — any less than this and the effect will be grainy.

Printing services can compensate for this by putting two or four smaller copies of the same image on a standard-size print — great for your wallet, but maybe not enough to enter in the International Photography Awards.

More information:

- www.optus.com.au/zooprints.
- www.picturecentre.kodak.com.au.
- See our test report on **camera phones** in CHOICE, Jan/Feb 2005.

Can you help?

HOME EXERCISE EQUIPMENT SURVEY

Do you own any home exercise equipment, such as an exercise bike, treadmill, elliptical trainer, rower or stepper? We're conducting a survey among owners of this equipment, and would appreciate your help.

You'll find the survey online at www.choice.com.au (follow the links under *What's new?* from the home page). It closes on May 16, 2005.

Many thanks.

Consumer rep wanted

The Australian Consumers' Association (publisher of CHOICE) is looking for a consumer representative to sit on the Standards Australia Technical Committee DB-085 Inspection of Buildings.

The rep will work on this committee to help draft Australian standards for building inspections and to represent the views of prospective property owners, including home owners. The immediate task of the committee is the revision of the existing standard for 'property inspections — residential properties', but later will include the development of a new standard for inspection of commercial property and the revision of the standard for timber pest inspections.

You don't have to be a technical expert in relation to property inspections, but an understanding and experience of them would be helpful. A basic understanding of engineering or science and some experience reading and using standards would be helpful in committee discussions. Your prime aims, though, would be to represent the interests of consumers and to have the standards written by the committee reflect the needs of consumers (along with those of other stakeholders) in a fair and balanced manner.

Neither the Consumers' Association nor Standards Australia can pay sitting fees for attending these meetings or other work. It's envisaged the committee will meet approximately three times a year, with the venue to change between cities in proportion to the residence of members, although skewed to the location of the secretariat in Sydney. Standards Australia can also arrange teleconference facilities. There will be a meeting of the committee in Sydney around May 2005.

If you're interested in representing consumers on this committee or would like further information, please contact John Ashes at CHOICE as soon as possible on (02) 9577 3370, or email jashes@choice.com.au.

Where's that food from?

Many of us seem to like the idea of buying Australian, and it especially makes environmental sense to buy locally grown food. But it's often hard to distinguish Aussie products from imports. So the new **Australian HomeGrown** logo (see right) should make it easier to support Australian producers. It'll be launched nationally at the end of this month.

The logo's for both fresh produce and packaged foods. Only foods grown in Australia are allowed to use it, and processed foods must be processed in Australia as well. The idea is to have stickers with the logo on packs of foods like strawberries and to show it on the headboard above items sold loose, such as bananas.

But do we really need yet another logo? Isn't most of our fresh food grown in Australia anyway?

This was certainly true in the past, but with increasing globalisation fresh food imports are growing. And we now expect our favourite fruit and vegies all year round, so some have to be imported during the off season to meet the demand.

As a result, we now import fresh fruit and vegetables worth more than $100 million a year, and it's not always easy to tell home-grown products from imports. Fresh fruit and vegetables don't generally have labels — and even when foods do have labels, they're not always as informative as they should be.

In theory, retailers have to put up a sign indicating when fresh fruit, vegetables and fish are imported (unless it's from New Zealand). But they needn't say which country they've been imported from. Fresh meat escapes the net altogether: retailers don't even have to tell you it's imported (though up to now the only imported meat has been pork).

And although the label on a packaged food must in theory identify the country in which it was made or produced, the wording can be pretty uninformative, with terms like "made in Australia from local and imported ingredients" and "subject to seasonal availability" muddying the waters.

To compound the confusion, there are two sets of food labelling requirements — one derived from the Food Standards Code and the other from the Trade Practices Act — and they're not consistent. This lack of consistency (compounded by lack of enforcement) makes it almost impossible for consumers to make informed choices.

The country-of-origin labelling regulations under the Food Standards Code are currently being reviewed by Food Standards Australia New Zealand. Meanwhile, logos like **Australian HomeGrown** are helpful. The bottom line, though, is that consumers shouldn't have to rely on logos for this information. There's no reason why labels shouldn't clearly identify where the food was grown and processed, or why retailers shouldn't be required to display the country of origin of fresh produce as clearly as the price.

yourletters

Dispensing *good* advice

I am writing in reference to the article *Dispensing advice* in CHOICE, September 2004. As a pharmacy manager, I'm responsible for the training of final-year pharmacy graduates, who then have to go before the Pharmacy Board of NSW for a final examination before registration.

I was so concerned by the findings of your mystery shoppers that I now give a copy of your article to each graduate; we discuss it in detail and I then examine them on the issues raised. I feel it's now an essential part of the training I give them, before they take on the responsibility of being a community pharmacist.

I hope my efforts to lift the standards of prospective pharmacists will be followed by other concerned pharmacists. Thank you for your article — it has at least drawn my attention to a disappointing situation.

Warren Eggins
Camden, NSW

Annoying airfare ads

I consider current airfare advertising misleading to the public and suggest pressure is put on the airlines to offer the full cost of a flight rather than the fare only, leaving consumers guessing as to the amount of sundry taxes, fees and loadings they have to pay.

Until recently Virgin Blue's website stated the full cost of flights. What you saw was what you paid. Now, to advertise on the same basis as Qantas and Jetstar, they have been forced to offer a fare with advice of approximate additional costs.

If a consumer didn't read the page properly, these charges would come as an unpleasant and disappointing surprise.

John Sexton
Smythesdale, Victoria

I think airlines should be forced to advertise fares on an all-inclusive basis — all other businesses have to advertise this way. This should also include credit card fees for internet travel bookings when there's no alternative payment method (such as cash, cheque or EFTPOS).

'Annoyed'
by phone

We've received a number of such letters and phone calls from people concerned about the recent changes in advertising airfares. CHOICE has given public support to airline prices quoted in advertising and on airline websites being the all-inclusive price — that is, the base fare and all levies, fees and taxes should be added together — to provide one clear and simple price for consumers to compare.

The use of all-inclusive airfares in advertising was introduced in 2002, which was in accordance with the Trade Practices Act. Published prices should present the full cash price of goods and services, and companies that don't do this could be misleading consumers and be in breach of the act.

However, after rulings (unrelated to airlines) in the Federal Court challenged the requirement for quoting a single price, Qantas (and its subsidiaries) changed its advertising to include costs on a 'total fare basis', where components payable are listed separately, rather than added together. Virgin Blue, while supportive of all-inclusive pricing, says it was compelled to follow suit in order to remain competitive.

This doesn't allow companies carte blanche to split prices into infinitesimal components scattered all over the ad. But as long as all the information is there, it's not ambiguous, the print not too fine and the full price can be readily calculated, it may in fact be acceptable according to the law as it currently stands. The ACCC, which also has a "strong preference" for all-inclusive pricing, has applied for the relevant laws to be tightened.

If you think you've been misled, or if you come across any ads that don't provide enough information to allow you to calculate the full amount payable, let us know. If you see this separation of taxes (GST) or other charges from the main price advertised spread to other goods and services, also let us know.

Meanwhile you could vote with your wallet when you book your travel, and show preference for companies that clearly disclose the full price.

THUMBS UP!

▮ **If you're not too sure about how well expensive new TV technology will perform in your home, it would be reassuring to know that you wouldn't be stuck with something that wasn't quite right. Which is why Owen Fisher gives a thumbs-up to the Alexandria (Sydney) MEGAMART. After trying out the large LCD TV he bought there, he discovered it didn't quite suit when he viewed it at home. MEGAMART happily exchanged it for a cheaper plasma TV, refunding the difference and delivering it free.**

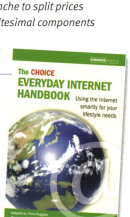
▮ **Judy Rahn gives a thumbs-up to the ELNA sewing machine repairman who replaced the broken switch of her "geriatric" machine with a used switch at no charge.**

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 2.

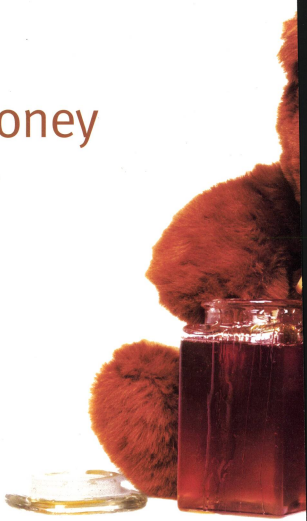
To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, John Sexton of Smythesdale, Victoria, receives *The CHOICE Everyday Internet Handbook* or any other book of his choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 46–48.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.



Not just bears like honey

Sweet talk from our Home Testers — some of the cheaper brands of honey taste the best.



IN A NUTSHELL

You don't have to pay *a lot for good-tasting honey. The honeys our Home Testers liked best were generally cheaper ones — and the one they liked most of all (***COLES FARMLAND Squeeze Pack Pure Australian Honey***) was one of the very cheapest.*

Honey has a reputation *as a healthy sweetener. In reality, though, it's about 80% sugar (glucose and fructose) and the rest is mostly water.*

Most people like honey. It's a sweetener with a special flavour, great for putting on your breakfast toast, dripping through crumpets or drizzled over fruit or yoghurt. Our Home Testers clearly liked it. They came up with words like 'buttery', 'velvety', and 'luscious' to describe what they were tasting.

And the good news is that you don't have to pay a lot of money for tasty honey. Our Home Testers checked out 30 different kinds without knowing how much they cost, and on average liked the cheaper ones best (see the table, page 10).

A TASTE OF HONEY

Honey isn't just honey. There are hundreds of different varieties, depending on the kinds of flower the bees take the nectar from.

Most Australian honey comes from eucalypt forests with flowers of many different species. The three honeys most popular with our testers (**COLES FARMLAND Squeeze Pack**, **LEABROOK FARMS** and **CAPILANO Twist & Squeeze**) were blends of honey from different flowers. The suppliers get their honey from many individual beekeepers whose bees collect the nectar from different types of flower. Expert tasters blend these different honeys in the right proportions to get a consistent product.

But there are also honeys with their own distinctive flavour, produced where bees gather nectar predominantly from a single type of flower. Of the single-flower honeys, yellow box was the most popular with our tasters. **ARCHIBALD'S**, **CAPILANO** and **LEABROOK FARMS** yellow box products all rated above average. The results for red gum were more mixed, but **CAPILANO Twist & Squeeze Red Gum** was one of the top five.

Generally, though, our testers weren't so keen on iron bark or leatherwood, which have stronger flavours. Opinion was more divided and these are honeys you're likely to either love or hate. Aficionados rave over leatherwood honey, but **GOLDEN NECTAR Real Leatherwood** was one of the least liked in our test. (It was described as tasting 'strong' or 'medicinal'.) Least liked of all was **COMVITA Beechwood Honeydew** from New Zealand. It's made by bees from sap instead of nectar and is dark in colour with its own distinctive flavour. You might love it, but most of our tasters didn't.

BUSY BEES

If you're a honey fan, you might not want to think too closely about how it's made. Bees suck up nectar (the sugary juice that collects in the heart of flowers) into a stomach that holds only the nectar. When fully loaded, they return to the hive and regurgitate it into the honeycomb. The nectar picks up secretions from the bees' glands, which contain enzymes that convert the nectar's sucrose (ordinary sugar) into glucose and fructose as the honey matures. Worker

CHOICE HOME TESTER

The taste test

Thank you to the 430 Home Testers who took part in this taste test. We sent each of them three brands of honey, so each brand was tasted about 40 times. So that the trialists couldn't recognise the products, we sent the honey in small plastic jars marked only with a code number.

As we couldn't test all the many brands and varieties of honey available in Australia, we chose 30 widely available products. You should be able to find them in major supermarkets and healthfood chains.

TAMARA GRAHAM

Isn't it funny
How a bear likes honey?
Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!
I wonder why he does? (A A Milne ©)

bees meanwhile fan the maturing honey with their wings to evaporate most of the water.

The honey's not produced for our benefit, of course — if the bees are left to their own devices they'll store it as food for the hive when nectar's in short supply. But they can produce a lot more honey than they need. Over most of Australia beekeepers can move their hives around to different locations where there's nectar for much of the year.

AS SWEET AS HONEY

Honey's been used as a sweetener since the dawn of civilisation and many people are convinced it's a healthier option than ordinary sugar (sucrose). Is this true?

Not really. Honey contains some vitamins and antioxidants but the quantities are so small you'd have to eat an awful lot of honey to make a significant difference to your day's intake. Generally, though, honey's a bit sweeter than ordinary table sugar so you don't need to use as much (in theory, at least). This is because honey has a lot of fructose (fruit sugar) that's sweeter than sucrose. So even though honey is about 20% water it's generally as sweet as the same weight of table sugar. Don't think because it's honey you can eat as much as you like — kilojoules are still kilojoules.

HONEY HAZARDS

Honey has a healthy reputation, but occasionally it can contain toxic substances from the flowers where the bees collected the nectar. Some Australian honey contains pyrrolizidine alkaloids that can cause liver damage. This comes from the weed Paterson's Curse (also called Salvation Jane) that can be prolific in drier parts of the country. Manufacturers routinely blend other honeys with Paterson's Curse honey and this reduces the pyrrolizidine alkaloids to what's believed to be a safe level. But it's best to avoid honey

CREAMED HONEY

We didn't include creamed honey in the taste test because it's very different from liquid honey and not as popular. But some people like it for its mouthfeel, or perhaps because it's not runny and is less messy to spread on toast.

It's still 100% honey. It's simply been allowed to crystallise, much like honey that's been left for too long in the fridge, but under carefully controlled conditions. It's then aerated through whipping, which gives it a light, creamy texture. The sugar crystals are very small so it feels smooth and velvety in your mouth.

WHAT TO BUY

When we statistically analysed the taste test results, these 10 honeys were our Home Testers' favourites. As the container sizes vary, we've given the prices we paid per 100 g.

COLES FARMLAND Squeeze Pack	$0.87
LEABROOK FARMS	$1.00
CAPILANO Twist & Squeeze	$1.00
CAPILANO Twist & Squeeze Red Gum	$1.25
PURE HARVEST Organic Native Forest	$1.37
ARCHIBALD'S Yellow Box	$0.98
CAPILANO Yellow Box	$1.49
COLES Organic	$0.98
LEABROOK FARMS Yellow Box	$1.25
BRAMWELLS	$0.74

JULIE HOWARD

1 Overall score
This is based on the tasters' overall impression of the honey. They were influenced mainly by its taste, but aroma and appearance were also important.

2 Price per 100 g
As the container sizes vary, we've calculated the price per 100 g for ease of comparison (based on what we paid in November 2004).

Brand (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Price per 100 g ($)
COLES FARMLAND Squeeze Pack	76	0.87
LEABROOK FARMS	72	1.00
CAPILANO Twist & Squeeze	71	1.00
CAPILANO Twist & Squeeze Red Gum	70	1.25
PURE HARVEST Organic Native Forest	70	1.37
ARCHIBALD'S Yellow Box	69	0.98
CAPILANO Yellow Box	69	1.49
COLES Organic	68	0.98
LEABROOK FARMS Yellow Box	68	1.25
BRAMWELLS	67	0.74
ALLOWRIE	66	1.10
ARCHIBALD'S Red Gum	66	0.98
SPIRAL FOODS Australian Organic	66	2.00
HOME BRAND	65	0.87
BEECHWORTH Iron Bark	63	1.21
IGA Buzz Bee	62	1.12
BI-LO	58	0.87
BEECHWORTH	57	1.16
GLENUGIE PEAK ORGANICS Yellow Box	56	2.14
LEABROOK FARMS Strawberry Clover	56	1.20
NATURAL HIGH Clover	56	1.15
LOTUS ORGANIC FOODS	53	1.55
BLACK & GOLD	50	0.96
CAPILANO Iron Bark	50	1.32
HEALTHY LIFE	50	2.16
BEECHWORTH Red Gum	49	1.22
NATURAL HIGH Tasmanian Leatherwood	49	1.98
ECO ORGANICS Native Australian Flora	46	1.87
GOLDEN NECTAR Real Leatherwood	45	1.79
COMVITA Beechwood Honeydew	31	3.28

STORING HONEY

Store honey in a cupboard or pantry at room temperature. If you keep it in the fridge it'll become too thick and it's likely to crystallise (but with chunky, crunchy crystals, not tiny ones like in creamed honey).

Even at room temperature, honey can crystallise over time. It has a tendency to absorb moisture, which contributes to crystallisation, so always close the lid tightly.

Crystallised honey still tastes the same, but if you don't like its rather gritty mouth feel, put the jar in warm water until it's liquid again, or take the lid off and warm it for a few seconds in the microwave.

that comes mostly from Paterson's Curse (it might be called 'Salvation Jane' on the label instead).

A couple of years ago there was a media scare that imported honey (mainly from China and Argentina) was contaminated with antibiotics called nitrofurans, which are prohibited in Australia. As a result, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) now tests imported honey for nitrofurans, so it should be as safe as locally produced honey. (Only two of the products in our test contained some imported honey.)

But it's definitely not a good idea to give honey to children less than a year old. It can contain spores of the dangerous bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*. Adults can cope with them but a baby's digestive system is too immature. They can get very ill from infant botulism.

MEDICINAL HONEY

Honey's been used for thousands of years as a treatment for ulcers, burns and other wounds. Only recently, though, has the scientific community started to take its antibacterial properties seriously.

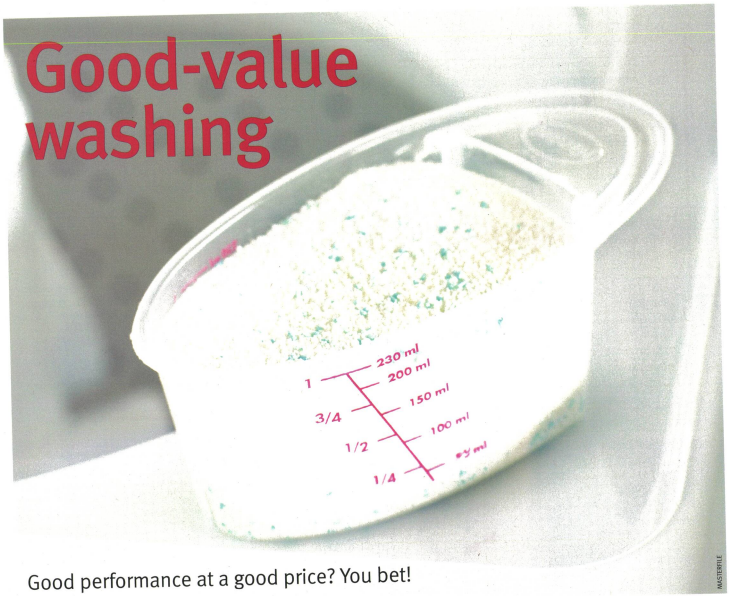
Research has identified a number of properties of honey as contributing to its antibacterial activity:

- **Low water content**. Bacteria need water to grow and for many species honey doesn't have enough of it (because of its 80% sugar content).
- **Acidity**. Undiluted honey is acidic enough to inhibit most bacteria, but once it's diluted (with body fluids, for example) it may not be as effective.
- **Hydrogen peroxide**. Honey contains enzymes that produce hydrogen peroxide (bleach). They become active when the honey is diluted (such as with body fluid) and produce enough hydrogen peroxide to be antimicrobial.
- **'X factor'**. Honey from certain plant species has a factor that increases its antibacterial effect and doesn't disappear when the honey is diluted or heated to destroy its enzymes. Researchers haven't yet identified what this mystery antibacterial factor is.

So all honey is antimicrobial to some extent, but honey from particular plant species is especially active. You'll find these special honeys in pharmacies and they're a lot more expensive than ordinary honey — while you *can* eat them, you probably wouldn't buy them for that reason. **MEDIHONEY** is sourced from some *Leptospermum* species in Australia and **COMVITA Active Manuka Honey** from another species of *Leptospermum* in New Zealand. These products are antibacterial, but as yet there's only limited evidence from clinical trials that they're an effective treatment for ulcers and wounds.

There's likely to be no harm in trying to treat a small wound with honey. But if you have a wound that's infected or isn't healing, see a doctor. ■

Good-value washing



HASSERELL

Good performance at a good price? You bet!

On test: 36 laundry powders and powder concentrates, to find those offering the best performance and value for money. There were no liquids in the test this time — we've found in the past that they don't perform as well as powders, and they're also less popular.

The best performers scored between 89% and 94% (see the table, page 13), with all front-loader detergents scoring well. Those that washed well and cost 35 cents or less per wash are rated Best Buys (see page 12).

The products with **enzymes** tended to wash better than those without, as the table shows. Enzymes help break down protein, starch and biologically based stains such as blood, sweat and make-up. They're particularly effective in a warm wash. However, they can cause irritation and, depending on how well your machine rinses, may be best avoided by people with sensitive skin.

If you're concerned about the impacts of laundry detergent on the environment, you'll probably be disappointed to see that products with low or no **phosphorus** tended to perform less well than products containing it. **HOME BRAND Laundry Powder Concentrate** and **LG Super-Enz** were the best of the detergents with low or no phosphorus, and are among our Best Buys for front loaders. See note 4, page 12, for more about phosphorus in detergents.

All that said, if most of your wash is made up of coloured items rather than whites, you might well be satisfied with a lower-scoring enzyme- and phosphate-free product if that's what you'd prefer.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **There are plenty** *of good detergents that cost 35 cents or less per wash.*
- **Generally speaking,** *products containing enzymes and phosphates tend to perform better. If you'd rather avoid them your options are more limited and you probably won't get such a good wash. See the table, page 13, for product details.*

BEST BUYS

While we'd recommend all the products that scored 89% or more, the following are detergents that washed well *and* for a good price — 35 cents or less per wash.

Some detergents are designed for top and front loaders, so appear in both lists. Front loaders typically use less detergent than top loaders, so the cost per wash is generally less, and some products are therefore Best Buys for a front loader but not for a top loader. See the table for other good performers.

If you have a front loader	Cost per wash (¢)
Front-loader detergents	
DUO Matic Concentrate	35
Other detergents	
DUO Concentrate	32
RADIANT Ultra Concentrate — 100% Active	25
BI-LO Laundry Powder	8
NO FRILLS Premium Laundry	21
RADIANT Ultra Concentrate — Cold	21
HOME BRAND Laundry Powder Concentrate	33
LG Super-Enz	20

If you have a top loader	Cost per wash (¢)
DUO Concentrate	32
SURF Ocean Fresh	33
BI-LO Laundry Powder	17
NO FRILLS Premium Laundry	31

JULIE HOWARD

TAMARA GRAHAM

1 Relative washing performance score

We used each detergent at the recommended dose to wash specially soiled cloth swatches attached to polycotton squares in warm (around 45°C) water (including for cold-water detergents). With a reflectometer (a sensitive electronic 'eye') we then measured how much dirt each detergent removed, and converted this measurement into a score. The test was run twice for each detergent, and where results initially differed, we repeated the testing.

To give 'relative washing performance', we compared the results with 'best wash' swatches that had been washed six times in the top-performing detergent (their score would be 100%). Warm water with no detergent added scores 62%.

The results for this round of laundry detergent testing can't be compared to previous tests because we've changed the test method.

2 Type

C = Powder concentrate
P = Powder

3 OK for front loaders

Because of their tumbling action and lower water use, front loaders usually need a low-sudsing detergent and/or a smaller dose.

4 Low or no phosphorus

Phosphates (which contain phosphorus) help soften the water and keep extracted dirt in suspension. In the environment, however, high levels of phosphorus can cause excessive growth of blue-green algae in inland waterways.

Detergents with a tick in this column contain no phosphorus (or less than 0.5%), equivalent to the 'NP' symbol used by major manufacturers. Those without ticks still comply with industry standards, containing less than 7.8 g per wash.

5 Contains enzymes

See page 11 for more on enzymes.

6 Cost per wash

This is based on the recommended dosage, the packet size costed and the average price in our survey of several supermarkets.

Apart from the four front-loader-only detergents, the figures refer to top loaders — the cost per wash for front-loader Best Buys (which are generally lower because you use less) are included in *Best Buys*, above.

Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	1 Relative washing performance score (%)	2 Type	3 OK for front loaders	4 Low or no phosphorus	5 Contains enzymes	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Packet size costed (g)	Average survey price ($)	6 Cost per wash (cents)
FORMULATED FOR FRONT LOADERS										
OMOmatic	93	C	✓		✓	NZ	Unilever	1000	5.93	59
DYNAMO Matic	92	C	✓		✓	Australia	Colgate-Palmolive	1500	6.90	51
DUO Matic Concentrate	91	C	✓		✓	Australia	Cussons	1000	3.58	35
RADIANT Matic	89	C	✓		✓	Australia	Cussons	1000	5.48	50
FOR TOP LOADERS (unless specified as also OK for front loaders)										
OMO High Performance (concentrate)	94	C			✓	NZ	Unilever	1000	5.92	51
AMWAY SA8 Plus	93	P	✓		✓	USA	Amway	1000	15.14	97
DRIVE Advanced Enzyme Power (concentrate)	93	C			✓	NZ	Unilever	1000	5.75	56
OMO Aloe Vera	93	C			✓	NZ	Unilever	1000	5.90	66
DUO Concentrate	92	C	✓		✓	Australia	Cussons	1000	3.58	32
DYNAMO Concentrate	92	C			✓	Australia	Colgate-Palmolive	1000	4.99	53
OMO High Performance (powder)	92	P			✓	NZ	Unilever	1000	5.81	64
RADIANT Ultra Concentrate — 100% Active	92	C	✓		✓	Australia	Cussons	1000	5.48	49
SURF Ocean Fresh	92	C			✓	NZ	Unilever	1000	3.89	33
BI-LO Laundry Powder	91	C	✓		✓	Australia	Bi-Lo	1000	2.17	17
DRIVE Advanced Enzyme Power (powder)	91	P			✓	NZ	Unilever	1000	5.75	67
NO FRILLS Premium Laundry	91	C	✓		✓	Australia	Franklins	1000	3.12	31
RADIANT Ultra Concentrate — Cold	91	C	✓		✓	Australia	Cussons	1000	5.48	43
HOME BRAND Laundry Powder Concentrate	90	C	✓	✓	✓	Australia	Woolworths	1000	2.17	37
LG Super-Enz	90	C	✓	✓	✓	Korea	LG Korea	1500	5.98	41
TRI-MAT Advanced Formula	88	C	✓		✓	Australia	Aldi	1500	5.99	40
AMWAY SA8 Laundry Concentrate	86	C	✓	✓		USA	Amway	750	19.98	60
BIO-ZET Advanced	86	C	✓	✓	✓	China	Kao	1000	5.99	33
TRI-MAT Laundry Powder	85	P	✓		✓	Australia	Aldi	2000	5.99	79
FAB Sunshine Fresh	79	C				Australia	Colgate-Palmolive	1000	4.29	42
OMO Sensitive	78	C				NZ	Unilever	1000	5.93	60
BI-LO Soap Powder	77	P	✓			Australia	Bi-Lo	1000	1.99	23
PLANET ARK	77	C	✓	✓		Australia	Planet Ark	1500	6.99	38
ALMAT High Performance Concentrate	76	C	ns			Australia	Aldi	2000	5.79	22
BI-LO Laundry Powder (Hot or Cold)	76	P	✓	✓		Australia	Bi-Lo	1500	2.33	26
SPREE Apple Fresh	76	C				Australia	Colgate-Palmolive	1000	2.97	32
HOME BRAND Laundry Powder Detergent	75	P	✓	✓		Australia	Woolworths	1500	2.33	27
LAUNDRITE Laundry Powder	75	P	✓	✓		Australia	Aldi	4000	4.49	21
AWARE Garden Safe	74	C	✓	✓		Australia	Bionomics	1500	6.99	27
NO FRILLS Laundry Detergent	74	P	✓	✓		Australia	Franklins	1500	2.59	32
PRICE SAVER Laundry Powder	74	P	✓	✓		Australia	Bi-Lo	4000	4.49	40
SPREE Lemon Fresh	74	P				Australia	Colgate-Palmolive	1000	2.82	32

ns *Not stated.*

NEW FORMULATIONS

The new formulations of **COLD POWER** and **HURRICANE** weren't available in time for our test.

Studies have shown St John's wort helps relieve mild depression, but can you be confident the brand you buy will work like the ones used in studies?

IN A NUTSHELL

- **St John's wort (SJW)** *may be a useful part of a treatment strategy for mild depression.*
- **However, not all SJW products** *are equal, and lack of transparency about their products on the part of companies that supply them makes it difficult to know which can be used with confidence.*

There's good evidence that products containing preparations of the herb St John's wort (SJW) can be useful for the treatment of mild depression. Many studies looking at short-term use of SJW have found it's better than a placebo and as effective as some antidepressants, with fewer side effects.

However, not all preparations containing SJW are created equal: the final product can vary according to the growing conditions for the herb, the plant parts used, time and method of harvest, extraction and other manufacturing processes, and storage.

The active ingredients in SJW aren't known exactly, nor is it known what levels of even the suspected actives are needed to be effective. This makes it difficult to create a standard for an effective preparation, although there are some guidelines for extraction processes and minimum levels of key components.

Complementary medicines in Australia haven't traditionally been subjected to the same level of pre-market evaluation for effectiveness as conventional pharmaceuticals, and post-market surveillance tends to occur on a random basis or when issues arise with particular products or manufacturers.

Yet consumers and health professionals interested in using SJW for mild depression need to be confident that products sold in Australian pharmacies, supermarkets and healthfood stores are equivalent to the effective products reported on in medical studies.

We took a look at SJW and the herbal medicines industry to determine what level of confidence we can place in its products. In particular, we were interested in the kinds of claims manufacturers are making, and the evidence they have to back up their claims. We also tested some products to try to check the levels of suspected active ingredients, although this wasn't quite as straightforward as we'd hoped — see *Chemical conundrums*, page 16, for more.

SJW CLAIMS

Generally speaking, the stronger the claims that are made, the more rigorous the evidence has to be.

Labels on the SJW products we looked at don't mention the word depression, because making claims about treating or managing depression would be considered very strong and required to be backed up with the highest level of evidence. This involves considerable trouble and expense, and perhaps from a company's point of view may not even seem necessary — after all, SJW's potential benefits for mild depression are widely known, so why not avoid the direct claim and with it all the bother?

Some products do list symptoms linked to depression for which the product may be a useful remedy, such as *"low mood and despondency"* and *"feelings of sadness and/or tearfulness"*. By and large, though, you'll find the label claims typically relate to the relief of stress and anxiety. One of SJW's known effects is to reduce anxiety, which can be a symptom or precursor of depression as well as being a condition in its own right.

Any substantial claims should ideally be backed up with good-quality scientific evidence based on clinical trials showing the product's effectiveness. If the product in question hasn't itself been tested, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) says it's acceptable for the 'sponsor' (the product's manufacturer or distributor) to provide evidence based on trials of other products identical to, or not substantially different from, its product — as long as the sponsor can show this to be the case.

WHERE'S THE EVIDENCE?

A therapeutic product that's 'listed' by the TGA is allowed to be sold in Australia on the basis that it meets certain safety and quality criteria. As of April 1, 2004, the TGA has required sponsors of listed medicines, including herbal medicines, to hold evidence for claims and indications they make about their products. However, up to now they haven't had to actually produce it until or unless asked. So we figured all we had to do was ask sponsors to show us their evidence, and given that they'd be bound to have it readily to hand (in case the TGA comes knocking on the door), they'd simply have to pop something off to us in the mail.

We invited the sponsors of 27 SJW products to do this: we received evidence for 14; five companies refused to take part, claiming commercial confidentiality as a reason (and one was concerned CHOICE would give it a negative report regardless of what evidence it gave us!); and we didn't hear from the last eight at all, despite contacting them numerous times. See *The evidence — who provided what*, page 16, for the brands and sponsors we looked at.

EVALUATING THE EVIDENCE

We asked three people with expertise in the fields of herbal medicines, pharmacology and/or psychiatry to evaluate the quality of the evidence provided to determine whether it backed up the claims made.

As mentioned earlier, sponsors can provide evidence based on products similar to their own, *as long as they can prove their similarity*. But it can be difficult to prove that one manufacturer's Product A is essentially the same as another manufacturer's Product B that was used in published clinical trials. If they use the same extract (that is, the same SJW source material) at the same dose, equivalence can be shown. Otherwise, there's little option but to test Product A itself to ensure scientific rigour.

Comprehensive evidence was provided for **CHEMISTS' OWN, FLORDIS Remotiv, GUARDIAN PHARMACIES, HERRON, HILTON HEALTHSTREAM** and **MEDIHERB** products. Their sponsors provided evidence based on the final product or on the extract used in their product (see *The evidence — who provided what*, for more).

The evidence provided by the rest of the companies that sent us any may adequately meet the TGA evidence requirements (there appears to be some latitude for interpretation). However, they didn't provide us with evidence that contained a clear link between their product and one shown to work in a clinical setting. This doesn't necessarily mean their products don't work just as well as those that gave us comprehensive evidence — just that the evidence given to us wasn't as strong.

As for the companies that didn't take part, they may well have evidence to back up their claims — they just didn't give it to us.

CHEMICAL CONUNDRUMS

Various chemicals in SJW have been found to show biological activity, and any or all of these may play a role in the antidepressant effect. The main chemicals include hypericin, pseudohypericin and other hypericins; hyperforin; and various flavonoids. SJW products have the amount of total hypericins listed on the label, and sometimes the amount of hyperforin.

The antidepressant effect was originally thought to be related to levels of hypericin, and more recently hyperforin, but a trial using a flavonoid-rich extract with no hypericin or hyperforin still found some antidepressant effect. This suggests that SJW's effectiveness is based on the product in its entirety, with compounds working together in a synergistic fashion.

For this reason, looking at the results of a chemical analysis to determine whether or not a product will work isn't as straightforward as for synthetic medicines like aspirin tablets, say, where a certain active ingredient can be identified and measured.

However, there's a need to ensure that the final preparation remains consistent over time, and companies standardise the extract (the SJW source material) against levels of hypericin to determine this consistency. While more isn't necessarily better in terms of effectiveness, unusually low levels indicate quality problems.

We thought it would be interesting to test some widely available SJW tablets to find out whether the products really contained the level of total hypericins stated on the label.

We used the most accurate test procedure available, called high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC). However, it only gives the figures for hypericin and pseudohypericin. That means the figures we got weren't directly comparable with the labelled claims for total hypericins.

It's been reported that when added together, hypericin and pseudohypericin typically amount to around 60–80% of the known 'total hypericins'. The levels of hypericin and pseudohypericin per tablet that we found averaged 63% of claimed total hypercin. This is in line with what we'd expect, and none of the products tested had startlingly low levels of hypericin.

We also tried to test the tablets using the same method as manufacturers use to obtain figures for total hypericin (spectrophotometric analysis). However, the results were inconsistent, most likely because we were testing on the tablet form, which contains many ingredients, some of which may interfere with analysis. To do this sort of testing accurately would require the

The evidence — who provided what

Comprehensive evidence was provided to back up claims for the following products:

FLORDIS Remotiv, where evidence was based on published papers of clinical trials of the product, which was shown to be effective for mild depression. There's enough information provided on the packaging for a consumer to do their own search for evidence in the medical literature. **CHEMISTS' OWN, GUARDIAN PHARMACIES, HERRON, HILTON HEALTHSTREAM** and **MEDIHERB,** where clinical trial evidence was based on products using the same dose of the particular SJW extract used in these products (although the extracts are confidential). Evidence also showed that the product was effective for mild depression.

The sponsor of THE HERBALIST (NATURAL HEALTH CONCEPTS) makes claims based on evidence of traditional use, and therefore isn't required to provide scientific evidence, though the evidence provided meets the TGA requirements for traditional use. It also provided details of the extract used, and it's one for which good scientific evidence exists.

Evidence for the following brands was considered 'incomplete': the evidence provided consisted of the name of the extract, but not evidence to back up claims made; or evidence that SJW works, but no clear link between that evidence and the particular product. In some cases this was for reasons of 'commercial confidentiality':

AMCAL, CENOVIS, HERB VALLEY (sponsored by **ESSENTIAL NUTRIENTS**), **GOLDEN GLOW, NATURE'S OWN, NATURE'S WAY (PHARM-A-CARE), SYAZAK (SWISSE VITAMINS**).

The following companies refused to take part in our evaluation of evidence, citing commercial-in-confidence or other reasons:

AUSTRALIAN NATURALCARE PRODUCTS, BLACKMORES, GREEN VALLEY NUTRITION (GNC), HERBS OF GOLD, HILDE HEMMES.

The following companies didn't respond to our request for evidence:

BIOFORCE AUSTRALIA (HYPERIFORCE), BLOOMS HEALTH PRODUCTS, DIRECT NUTRITIONAL SUPPLIES (VIGA-VITA), HEALTH WORLD LIMITED, HEALTHERIES OF AUSTRALIA, NUTRITION CARE PHARMACEUTICALS, TP HEALTH (GREENRIDGE), WELEDA AUSTRALIA.

co-operation of the companies, so we'd know all the ingredients in the tablets (active and inactive).

So while the results using the HPLC method tend to confirm manufacturers' claims and quality assurance procedures, the fact that it doesn't match the methods they use when making their products doesn't make it at all easy to check their claims. Our experiences highlight the need for a testing procedure that allows for post-market surveillance of quality by independent bodies such as ourselves, to make sure we're getting what we think we're getting when we buy these products.

BOTTOM LINE

The lack of transparency we encountered would be unacceptable from manufacturers of conventional medicines. Even in this industry, though, there have been well publicised cases of pharmaceutical companies deliberately withholding research findings from public scrutiny — and, indeed, from licensing authorities — leading to actual or potential serious health problems for people taking the drugs. Fortunately, these cases appear to be uncommon, and when discovered can result in a financially devastating backlash.

Unlike many other complementary healthcare products, there's good evidence for the effectiveness of St John's wort as a treatment for mild depression. When we started this story we thought we'd be able to present you with a thorough assessment of the products on the market and make clear recommendations as to which ones are the best. Due to the constraints on testing the contents of SJW products and the lack of transparency about evidence for their products' efficacy shown by some manufacturers, all we can now say is that the evidence for the claims made by the six brands of SJW noted on page 15 is convincing. What we can't tell you is whether any or all SJW products contain what the labels say they do.

If herbal medicines are going to be taken seriously in the general and medical communities, it would be in the interests of consumers as well as those sponsors that make or distribute genuinely effective products if the guidelines for evidence were clearer, tougher and more rigorously enforced. Then the public could be sure that the TGA is regulating effectively, and that the complementary medicine products they're buying are worth the money.

In the final stages of putting this article together, the government announced an overhaul of the regulatory regime for complementary medicines, to take effect at an unspecified time in the future, including a crackdown on the claims being made. Sponsors will then be required to provide the TGA with a summary of evidence, and the TGA will increase its monitoring of the evidence.

At present, though, as a consumer you'd be mistaken if you thought you could buy any formulation of SJW at random and be assured that it works, and that the company has clear evidence that it works. The regulatory system is failing to adequately protect consumers, and also failing to protect those members of the industry who are doing the right thing. In the case of SJW, where there's good evidence of its effectiveness as a treatment for mild depression, this is a real shame. ■

Depression in Australia

It's been said that in any one month 4% of Australians are suffering from depression, and one in five will suffer depression in their lifetime. It's estimated to cost the community $3 billion per year in direct and indirect costs.

Rates of reported depression are on the increase, partly because people are becoming increasingly aware of depression symptoms and coming forward for treatment rather than suffering alone, but also because we (the human race) seem to be getting more and more depressed.

Yet there's concern that despite a big increase in reported levels of depression, it's still underdiagnosed, and it's predicted that it will be the second-largest burden of disease in Australia by the year 2020. Already it's the second most common chronic problem for which people visit a GP, with GPs prescribing around 80–90% of all antidepressants.

What is 'mild' depression?

The official definition of *mild depression* is having suffered at least two weeks of abnormal sadness or low mood, and being less interested in doing things you previously enjoyed, as well as at least one of the following symptoms: loss of confidence, feelings of excessive guilt, thoughts of death, poor concentration, agitation or retardation (mental and physical slowness), sleep disturbances or change in appetite.

Unlike with more severe forms of depression, people with mild depression can still continue to function at work and

home and take part in social activities, but not as well as usual and with less motivation.

Mild depression is usually under-reported because people don't think the symptoms are bad enough to get help, which is unfortunate because diagnosing and treating depression at this early stage can help prevent it becoming worse.

Are we overmedicating?

The use of antidepressants in Australia rose by about 17% per year over the 10 years to 2001, reflecting a worldwide trend. Dramatic increases in depressed patients are bound to put a strain on human medical resources, and prescribing drugs is a time- and cost-effective way of dealing with those who seek treatment. Aggressive marketing by the drug companies may also have increased prescription rates.

But it's not always a good solution. For a start, there's not a lot of evidence the drugs are effective for people with mild depression, although they can be for some. It also reinforces the 'pill for every ill' mentality. Some experts are concerned that prescribing drugs may simply mask psychosocial problems that could be dealt with more effectively by counselling or talking therapies, like cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT). Curing the symptoms won't necessarily cure the illness or provide a long-term solution.

Dependence and withdrawal symptoms are also not unknown, meaning some people are using drugs for long periods of time. And there are many concerns about long-term effects and side effects of newer antidepressants, and even doubts as to how well they work. It's increasingly being recommended that drugs aren't prescribed as a first-line treatment of mild depression.

The preferred treatment for people with mild depression is often counselling or psychological therapy, such as CBT, and many do receive this treatment. Some GPs have been undergoing special training for managing depression, including treatment using focused psychological therapies.

Other non-drug management strategies — exercise and 'bibliotherapy' (relevant self-help books) — have also been found useful.

The internet can also be a useful source of treatment, and a study looking at two Australian National University sites — BluePages (designed to educate people about depression) and MoodGym (an interactive website offering information about CBT) — found that they were helpful at reducing symptoms of depression (see *More information*, below).

A place for St John's wort?

It's likely that a large number of the people being prescribed antidepressants could benefit from those SJW preparations that are backed up by good evidence for clinical effectiveness. Obviously if the TGA and manufacturers work together to ensure *all* products available on the shelves are good-quality, effective preparations, this will make things a lot easier for consumers and health professionals.

Benefits of SJW vs drugs include similar efficacy, lower cost (to the individual and the health system), fewer side effects and less risk of dependence. One of the main problems with conventional antidepressants for people with mild depression is that the side effects can reduce the likelihood of sticking with them.

However, simply swapping a conventional medicine for a herbal one doesn't resolve the 'pill for every ill' mentality, and doesn't provide a long-term solution, which is likely to involve making changes to thought patterns and life circumstances, and learning to deal with crises.

Ideally, perhaps, anyone suffering from mild depression would have access to whatever treatment was judged most appropriate, whether counselling, psychological therapies or medication (conventional or SJW) — alone or in combination. The reality, however, is that the provision of resources required for counselling and psychological therapies is inadequate, and for many people medication will be the primary treatment.

There are concerns about interactions of St John's wort with other medications, especially for people who self-medicate with SJW without their doctor's knowledge. But as long as you make your doctor aware of all medications (herbal and conventional) you're taking, most people can use it safely.

More information

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners recommends the following websites about depression:

- www.beyondblue.org.au.
- www.depressionet.com.au.
- www.reachout.com.au (aimed particularly at youth).
- www.moodgym.anu.edu.au.
- www.bluepages.anu.edu.au.

PHOTOS: TAMARA GRAHAM

Coffee and cake to go

You could be taking away a lot more than you bargained for ...

Grabbing a coffee on the way to work or while out shopping is a regular routine for many people. And because it slots in between meals, it's unlikely you think about the impact it has on your diet, and understandably so — with virtually no kilojoules, no fat and no sugar, a black coffee puts no dent in a diet. Even adding a dash of milk or a teaspoon of sugar will boost the nutrition numbers only slightly.

But while a standard latte or cappuccino may be relatively harmless in the nutrition stakes, the increasingly popular iced and frappéd-type coffee drinks give you a lot more than just a caffeine buzz. One of these could provide a quarter of the total kilojoules and almost half the fat that many people should consume in a day.

We tested the kilojoules, fat and sugar in a range of hot and chilled coffee drinks from coffee chains, and the results are shown in the table, page 21. To give you an idea of just how much they contribute to your diet we've also provided representative daily intake figures for energy, fat and sugar as a reference.

GET YOUR JUST DESSERTS

It's no great revelation that a chocolatey mocha drink or a coffee with flavoured syrup can be quite sugary. But it's the chilled coffee drinks — particularly those that come topped with a luscious swirl of whipped cream — that are the real indulgence. One regular-sized drink can contain the equivalent of around 15 teaspoons of sugar — that's more sugar than in a Mars bar or a can of Coke — or as much fat as in not one but *two* 50 g bags of chips.

While we wouldn't recommend having one every day, you don't have to deny yourself completely. Most chains are happy to accommodate individual drink requests, so you could limit the amount of kilojoules, fat and sugar you're getting by:

IN A NUTSHELL

- **A coffee-to-go can provide** *a much needed caffeine fix. But some coffee drinks, particularly the chilled, iced and frappé versions, provide a lot more kilojoules, fat and sugar than you might realise (see the table, page 21, for details).*
- **To save on kilojoules,** *fat and sugar you can customise your brew: switching to skim milk, choosing a smaller size and saying 'no' to whipped-cream toppings can all help. And think twice before buying a sweet treat to nibble on as well — it could double your indulgence in a few bites.*

- Asking for your drink to be made with skim milk (if it's not already).
- Opting out of the whipped-cream toppings — this can save you around 10 grams of fat and 400 kilojoules.
- Choosing smaller rather than bigger-sized drinks.

SUPERSIZE ME?

Some chains offer drinks in cups that hold 600 mL (it might be called 20 oz, or otherwise non-metrically it's about a pint) or even more. At these larger sizes, a chilled coffee drink can deliver you as much as 80 grams (about 20 teaspoons) of sugar, and almost half the fat an average woman should be getting in a day. So if you're watching your diet, opting for the smaller sizes will save you more than just money.

For example, buying a 480 mL (16 oz) cup of **GLORIA JEANS Crème Brulée** instead of the 720 mL (24 oz) cup on offer will give you savings of over 900 kilojoules, 10 grams of fat and 25 g of sugar. All the taste, but far less impact. ■

Coffee dictionary

We're probably all familiar with cappuccino, latte, flat white, long black and macchiato — the more common variations on the espresso. But what about...

- **Affogato** — espresso coffee poured over a ball of vanilla ice cream.
- **Mocha** (or Mocca) — espresso mixed with chocolate and topped up with steamed milk, often garnished with chocolate sprinkles.
- **Vienna/Dutch** — long black topped with whipped cream, sprinkled with chocolate or nutmeg. Traditionally (although not in these coffee chains), a Dutch coffee is laced with gin. And for the kids...
- **Babycino** — kids are getting into café culture younger and younger these days. This is frothed milk sprinkled with chocolate powder, sans coffee.

Trick or treat?

It's tempting to grab a muffin or a bikky when you're getting a coffee-to-go, but consider the impact before you buy.

Croissants, while low in sugar, tend to be as high in fat as Danish pastries. And most cake-like treats are by nature pretty sweet. On top of a sugary coffee drink, you'd need to compensate with a considerable amount of exercise each day to burn off all the energy a snack like this provides (as an indication, jogging for half an hour uses up around 820 kilojoules). If you're deskbound for a large part of the day, this can be difficult, so 'treating' yourself regularly could be a bad idea. (See the table, right, for just how much fat, sugar and kilojoules these snacks add to your diet.)

1 Chain / product

A range of interesting coffee drinks was chosen from the menus of seven national coffee chains and sent to the lab for nutrient analysis. It isn't a comprehensive list of available drinks or a systematic brand comparison, just a representative sample of what's on the market.

If you want information on other drinks and food sold in coffee chains, try asking for it when you buy — some chains already have or are planning to have nutrition information available to customers on their websites and/or in stores on request.

2 Serve size

These are takeaway cup sizes.

Hot drinks

Most chains sell hot drinks in a range of sizes. We've provided nutrition information for the 'medium' 12 oz (approx. 360 mL) size only, as all chains sold this size.

Chilled drinks

Some chains only sell chilled drinks in one size (425 mL). For those that have a range of sizes, we've given nutrition information for the 16 oz (480 mL) drinks, the size closest to 425 mL.

3 Nutrition

The amount of kilojoules, fat and sugar in the table is based on laboratory analysis of composite samples of standard drinks as sold to us in January (rounded to the nearest whole number). Actual serving size and nutrient values may vary slightly.

4 Coffee extras

This nutrition information is for average portion sizes of generic coffee extras, as calculated by FoodWorks, a food composition software package.

5 Treats

This nutrition information is for average portion sizes of generic treats, again as calculated by FoodWorks. The figures should be used as a guide only, as recipes (and therefore the fat, sugar and kilojoules in them) may vary from store to store.

6 Representative daily intake

These figures are approximate, based on a woman aged 30–60, weighing approximately 65 kg and measuring roughly 165 cm in height. Use them as a guide if you want to work out whether you're eating too much, too little or just right every day.

- Energy: 8500 kJ — this is the recommended daily intake of kilojoules for the 'average' woman described above to maintain her current weight.
- Fat: 70 g — this is the total amount of fat the average woman can consume per day and have a diet that doesn't contain too much fat.
- Sugars: 105 g — this is the maximum amount of all types of sugar the average woman should consume in a day.

1 Chain / product (from lower to higher kilojoules, within categories)	2 Serve size (mL)	3 NUTRITION Kilojoules	Kilojoules as % of average woman's RDI*	Fat (g)	Fat as % of average woman's RDI*	Sugars (g)	Sugars as % of average woman's RDI*
HOT							
Coffee, black	360	11	0	0	0	0	0
McCAFÉ Vienna Coffee **(A)**	360	288	3	6	9	1	1
STARBUCKS Caramel Macchiato	360	864	10	9	13	23	22
BB'S ESPRESSO Dutch Coffee **(A)**	360	1044	12	17	24	13	12
MICHEL'S ESPRESSO Mocca **(A)**	360	1044	12	10	14	25	24
GLORIA JEANS Caramelatte	360	1080	13	10	14	31	30
HUDSONS Marble Mocha	360	1098	13	10	14	29	28
CHILLED							
STARBUCKS Coffee Frappuccino **(B)**	425	1445	17	12	17	47	45
HUDSONS IceStorm Coffee Flavour	480	1632	19	11	16	53	50
BB'S ESPRESSO Cappuccino Frost **(A)**	480	1656	19	15	22	58	55
McCAFÉ Iced Coffee **(A)**	480	1704	20	18	26	45	43
McCAFÉ Caramel Latte Frappe **(A)**	480	1728	20	12	17	58	55
BB'S ESPRESSO Mocha-Latte Frost **(A)**	425	1764	21	15	21	55	52
GLORIA JEANS Very Vanilla Chiller **(A)**	480	1776	21	22	32	40	38
GLORIA JEANS Crème Brulée **(A)**	480	1872	22	21	30	53	50
MICHEL'S ESPRESSO Hazelnut Chiller **(A)**	480	2184	26	27	39	34	32
MICHEL'S ESPRESSO White Lightning Chiller **(A)**	425	2231	26	33	47	33	31
HUDSONS Iced Coffee White Chocolate Flavour **(A)**	480	2256	27	27	39	58	55
JAMAICA BLUE Iced Mocha **(A)**	480	2280	27	20	29	67	64
4 COFFEE EXTRAS							
Milk, skim (<0.2% fat)	30	45	1	0	0	2	2
Milk, reduced-fat (1–2% fat)	30	63	1	0	0	2	2
Milk, whole / standard (2–4% fat)	30	84	1	1	1	1	1
Cream, whipped for topping, unsweetened	25 g	400	5	10	14	1	1
Sugar (1 teaspoon)	4 g	67	1	0	0	4	4
5 TREATS							
Friand, raspberry	84 g	1150	14	16	23	23	22
Banana bread	135 g	1400	16	6	9	30	29
Biscuit, choc chip	71 g	1500	17	17	24	20	19
Muffin, blueberry	142 g	1550	18	16	23	23	22
Scone, fruit	118 g	1600	19	9	13	15	14
Danish pastry, fruit and custard	144 g	1850	22	23	33	23	22
Croissant, plain	117 g	2000	23	28	40	6	6
6 REPRESENTATIVE DAILY INTAKE (average adult woman)		8500	100	70	100	105	100

COFFEE CURES

There's always some argument you can use as to why a coffee hit is an absolutely essential part of your day — other than merely allowing you to function. Most recently, researchers in Japan found that people who drank coffee daily, or nearly every day, had half the liver cancer risk of those who never drank coffee, although the reasons for this remain unclear.

While coffee does contain large amounts of antioxidants, which are associated with cancer prevention, it also contains caffeine — excessive consumption of which can have negative physical effects including sleeping difficulties, hyperactivity and anxiety. As with most things, it's best to take it in moderation.

* *RDI = Representative daily intake (see note 6, left, for details).*

(A) *Topped with whipped cream as standard.*

(B) *Also available in a 'light' option, with less kilojoules and fat.*

PHOTOS: TAMARA GRAHAM

Small card, big interest rate

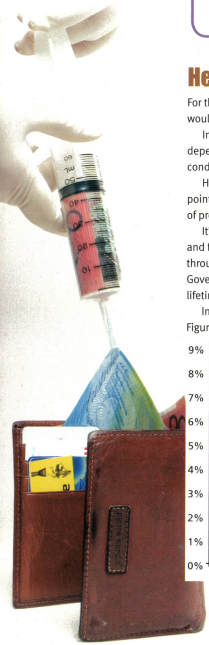
The credit card as fashion statement? Yep, **NATIONAL AUSTRALIA BANK** has launched a fancy-looking mini credit card that's available in five 'must-have' colours.

It's targeted at younger people, who can team it with accessories like a phone hook and safety clip — designed to make it convenient to take the card for a night out.

The mini card can be used in EFTPOS swipe machines, but for ATMs and some other card machines you have to use the additional standard-size card.

While the card itself may be small, it has an above average interest rate of 16.95% — expensive if you don't pay it off every month. If you do, and so won't be paying interest, compare its fees and bells and whistles with others and see how it'd suit you: it has an annual fee of $19 and a cashback rewards program.

Under the cashback offer you receive 1% of your total monthly purchase amount credited back to your account, capped at $10 per month. So if you spent $1000 a month on purchases you'd get back $120 a year.



Health insurance premiums rise again

For the fourth year in a row, health funds recently informed their members there would be premium rises, this year 8% on average.

Increases vary between policies and from fund to fund, and are different depending on the state you live in. The new rates, along with changes to cover conditions, were to be applied in April or May.

Health funds justified the increases — which are above the inflation rate — by pointing to increased costs, such as payments to doctors and hospitals and the cost of prostheses like pacemakers, as well as increased use of health cover.

It's hard to believe increases of this size are sustainable, both for fund members and for taxpayers, who subsidise 30% of private health insurance premiums through the private health insurance rebate. The increases also show that the Government's various measures and incentives, such as the 30% rebate and lifetime cover, have failed to keep a lid on premium increases.

In the last 10 years premiums have gone up by a compounded total of 71% (see Figure 1, below) — again, way beyond inflation in the same period.

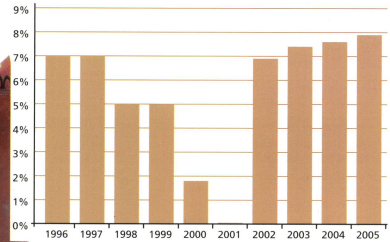
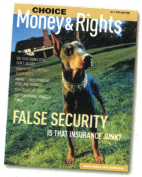


Figure 1. The average increase occurring from April of the year shown to March of the following year. (Source: Australian Government Department of Heath and Ageing. 2005 figure from PHIAC.)

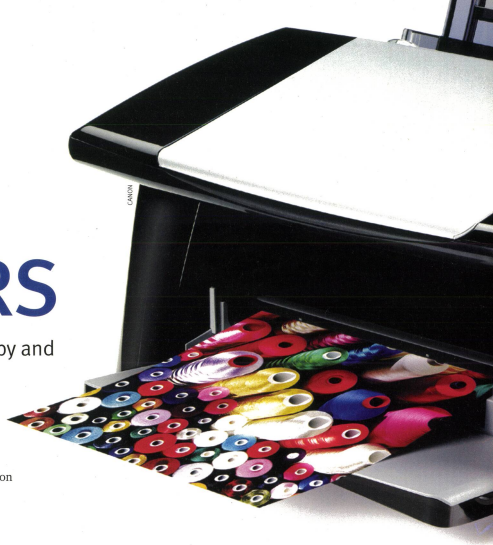
WANT MORE MONEY INFO?

CHOICE *Money & Rights* magazine is published six times a year and contains more information on money topics (and your consumer rights) than we could ever fit into CHOICE. To subscribe call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines.



All-in-one PRINTERS

They print, they scan, they copy and some can even fax.



All-in-one printers (also called multifunction printers, MFPs or multifunction devices) incorporate functions such as printing, copying, scanning and faxing into one unit. They're usually a cheaper option than buying all those products separately and will probably save space on the desktop, although some are quite large (see the table, page 27, for sizes).

All the products in this test are based around an inkjet printer, which means they can print colour as well as plain black-and-white. However, if you want a good-quality photo printer only the **CANON Pixma** models in this test can match the better printers in past inkjet printer tests (see *Computer* CHOICE, July/August 2004).

HOME BUSINESS

If your all-in-one stops working you don't want to find yourself without critical faxing or copying functions. It might be wise to consider buying a back-up machine for emergencies, or keeping your old ones.

Consider carefully whether your business really needs a colour printer. Past tests show that black-and-white laser printers are generally much cheaper to run than inkjets — usually only a few cents per page — and although the most economical inkjet for black-and-white in this test could match their economy (see *Ink costs*, page 25), costs begin to soar as soon as colour appears on the page. Lasers generally cost more to buy, but if you print a lot you could save the price difference reasonably quickly.

If your business requires a medium to high volume of printing (including incoming faxes) you'd be well advised to steer clear of an inkjet for your main printer. If you really need colour occasionally, buy a separate inkjet printer specifically for that purpose.

PERFORMANCE

Printing

Overall print quality is acceptable for all but the **BROTHER**s and the **LEXMARK X5250** and **X7170**. The top-scoring **CANON Pixma** models performed well in all the tests and are particularly good for photos. They probably aren't quite a match for a dedicated photo printer, but should be satisfactory for most purposes.

Print quality vs speed is an issue for some models. The **EPSON Stylus CX3500** achieved good picture quality, but it takes over seven minutes to print an A4 photo, which brought its overall printing score

WHAT TO BUY

HP Photosmart 2610		$499
CANON Pixma MP750		$459
CANON Pixma MP780		$599
EPSON Stylus CX3500	BEST BUY	$199

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Multifunction printers can be good** *space savers, particularly in a home office.*
- **Be prepared to compromise** — *you may have to settle for slower scanning or lower-quality photo printing.*
- **If your multifunction printer goes on the blink,** *you also lose copying, scanning and faxing functions.*
- **Most of these products are too costly to run** *if you've a large amount of printing to do. You'd be better off with a laser model.*

A genuine turn-off

Unfortunately all the products in our *What to buy* list are relatively power-hungry when on standby — switched on but not doing anything. This isn't going to cost you much compared to the cost of ink or paper (about $25 a year for the worst of them), but what's really alarming is that over half of them continue to use only a little less power when they're turned off (see the table, page 27, for power usage when off). The only way to stop these models sucking electricity is to turn them off at the wall and/or unplug them.

The **BROTHER**s, on the other hand, are the star performers in this area, using nothing when turned off, and the **EPSON**s next to nothing.

down. The real slowcoaches are the **HP PSC 1315** and **PSC 1350**, at over 22 minutes each. The **CANON Pixma** models are the quickest at this task, taking just under two and a half minutes.

Clarity and speed are the major concerns with printing plain text. Although most do a reasonable job, the **HP PSC 1350** has the clearest type.

The real speedsters with text are the **LEXMARK X5250, X7170** and **HP Photosmart 2610**, followed pretty closely by the **CANON Pixma**s. As the **LEXMARK**s' low printing scores show, however, speed isn't everything.

Copying

Photocopying is usually seen as a quick and convenient way of sharing documents. All the tested models have a copy function, but it's not really a photocopy, which is a fairly quick process using light and electrostatics to stick black toner onto a sheet of paper. These products scan the page and then print it via the inkjet printer — a slower and more expensive process.

A scanner generally lets you scan documents that aren't perfectly flat as well as single pages.

TAMARA GRAHAM

The **CANON Pixma**s, **EPSON CX6500**, **HP Photosmart 2610** and **LEXMARK 6250** can manage a simple B&W page in less than 20 seconds as long as they aren't connected to the computer (or the computer is turned off). If we tried to copy when they were connected to the computer, times increased significantly for all except the **HP**s. This appears to be caused by the extra processing done by the computer.

If you're attracted to one of these devices because you need to copy lots of documents, consider a dedicated photocopier instead. All-in-one printers aren't cheap copiers — every page is an inkjet print and the cost of each page can be high, particularly if there's any colour involved (see *Ink costs*, far right).

Scanning

If you've a hard copy of a picture you want to enhance, repair or send by email, or a typed document that needs some editing (see *OCR*, below), a scanner is a very handy tool. All the models in this test have one, but their performance varies considerably.

The best overall is the **HP Photosmart 2610** and it, along with the **LEXMARK X7170**, **CANON**s and **EPSON**s (except the **RX430**) will be suitable for most tasks. None in this test can scan slides, and if you're looking for high-quality output when scanning pictures, you'll get better results from a more sophisticated standalone scanner.

OCR

Retyping lengthy documents is a tiresome task. Optical character recognition (OCR) software scans an image of your document and converts it into a word processing document. In this test all the models except the **EPSON**s come with it.

Unfortunately, the software supplied with the **CANON**s is a 'lite' version, which lacks some functions — you have to pay more for the 'full' version. The software supplied with the **HP**s is also a 'lite' version and requires you to log onto the manufacturer's website to register it before it will work.

They all handled a simple letter with ease, but a more complicated document containing images and text was too hard for most and only the **LEXMARK X7170** could handle it well.

Faxing

Although email has probably reduced the number of faxes sent these days, the fax machine is still a useful tool for those times when you need to send or receive a non-digital document. All five of the models with fax function in this test (see the table, page 26, for those that have it) do an OK job of receiving and sending. All work independently of the computer, and will store a number of pages in their memory if the paper runs out. The **BROTHER MFC210C** and **LEXMARK X7170** are particularly easy to use.

Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as supplied by manufacturers in February 2005.

HP PHOTOSMART 2610

Price: $499

The overall best performer in this test. It's versatile and easy to use, has a good scanning score and is one of the few in the test with a colour monitor as well as the ability to print directly from a camera or memory card. On the negative side you have to turn it off at the wall and/or unplug it to stop it draining power.

PROFILES | CRT

CANON PIXMA MP750

Price: $459

CANON PIXMA MP780

Price: $599

The only difference between these models is that the **PIXMA 780** has a fax function. They have the best printing scores in the test and are the only ones with a real duplex function (printing on both sides of the paper – see *What to look for*, page 26, for more).

Unfortunately, they're relatively expensive to run and you'll have to turn them off at the wall and/or unplug them to stop them draining power.

EPSON STYLUS CX3500

Price: $199 ◀ BEST BUY ▶

If you're looking for an all-in-one printer without a fax that's cheap to buy and run, this is the best in the test. It's the least versatile, doesn't have an LCD screen or OCR software, and most of its scores are only OK, but if running costs override quality concerns it's a good choice.

Ink costs

This test was conducted in conjunction with several other consumer organisations around the world. Unfortunately, printer manufacturers aren't always consistent with ink cartridges for the same machine country to country, so we can't report on ink usage for the **EPSON CX6500**, **HP Photosmart 2610** and **HP PSC 2355** because the Australian print cartridges weren't tested.

As you can see from the table below, ink costs can vary greatly across and within brands. Of those tested the **EPSON Stylus CX3500** is the overall cheapest to run, followed by the **EPSON RX430**. The most expensive are the **LEXMARK P6250** and **X5250** and the **HP PSC 1315**.

Based on a yearly use of 1095 B&W pages (three per day), 365 colour pages and one photo page per week, the **LEXMARK P6250** and **X5250** will cost around $700 and $505 a year respectively to run, which is nearly twice their purchase price. Even the relatively frugal **EPSON Stylus CX3500** will cost around $153 in this scenario.

Perhaps we'll see a day when manufacturers throw in a printer when you buy your first set of ink cartridges.

Ink costs	Cost per page ($)		
Brand / model	1 B&W	2 Colour	3 Photo
BROTHER DCP-110C	0.08	0.17	2.00
BROTHER MFC210C	0.08	0.24	2.21
CANON Imageclass MP390	0.09	0.27	2.64
CANON Pixma MP750	0.05	0.22	2.01
CANON Pixma MP780	0.06	0.21	1.88
EPSON Stylus CX3500	0.03	0.18	1.47
EPSON RX430	0.05	0.23	1.40
HP PSC 1315	0.17	0.32	2.85
HP PSC 1350	0.08	0.35	2.75
LEXMARK P6250	0.24	0.64	5.65
LEXMARK X5250	0.14	0.64	3.45
LEXMARK X7170	0.10	0.30	2.26

1 B&W

This is based on printing a standard A4 business letter (from the ISO/IEC 10561 standard, with approximately 2–2.5% ink coverage) printed from Microsoft Windows XP using true type Arial 12, with the printer set to 'letter quality'.

2 Colour

This is an A4 spreadsheet page including a table with figures and text in different typefaces and sizes, grids, frames, coloured blocks and a graphic presentation of table values. The printer is set to 'normal' colour.

3 Photo

An A4 page full of photos. The printer is set to its best photo quality.

For each of the three settings the test was continued until the printer either refused to print or the quality of the output was impaired. Early warnings of ink running low were ignored as they're often inaccurate. Costs per page are based on the average ink usage over two new cartridges.

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 Printing score (%)	3 Copying score (%)	4 Scanning score (%)	5 Faxing score (%)	6 Ease of use score (%)	7 Versatility score (%)	8 Environmen score (%)
HP Photosmart 2610	67	61	68	77	58	75	80	11
CANON Pixma MP750	66	71	65	66	na	69	83	6
CANON Pixma MP780	66	71	65	66	58	68	83	6
CANON Imageclass MP390	58	57	51	61	58	70	65	14
EPSON RX430	57	57	45	53	na	72	48	70
EPSON Stylus CX3500	57	57	46	60	na	74	36	75
EPSON CX6500	56	49	49	56	na	68	56	69
HP PSC 2355	56	52	53	50	na	74	64	25
LEXMARK X7170	56	44	47	73	55	72	67	22
HP PSC 1350	54	46	54	54	na	72	44	43
HP PSC 1315	53	46	53	51	na	72	41	40
LEXMARK P6250	53	47	52	41	na	71	71	24
LEXMARK X5250	49	44	43	46	na	74	43	23
BROTHER DCP-110C	48	34	46	45	na	61	53	69
BROTHER MFC210C	48	34	46	42	55	61	53	69

What to look for

Connections: All the models in this test connect to the computer via a USB cable. Some also allow direct printing of photos from a digital camera via PictBridge (see below), or directly from the camera's flash memory card by putting it into a slot in the printer (see the table for which have these features). All those that can print directly from flash cards can accept Compact Flash types I and II, Secure Digital, MultiMedia Card, Smart Media Card, Memory Stick and xD Card.

PictBridge is a relatively new way for digital cameras and inkjet printers to communicate (see the photo, right). The printer and camera don't have to be the same brand, but both must be PictBridge-compatible and the connection between them a USB cable. Once connected, the camera can control the basic printer functions so you can print without a computer.

Duplex printing allows you to print on both sides of the paper. Only the **CANON Pixma**s have this built into the hardware so that the paper is flipped by the printer. The others have a software function that requires you to collect the pages after a first run and feed them through the device again in the correct order to get print on both sides.

LCD: An LCD screen is particularly handy for printers that can print directly from digital camera memory cards. See the table for those that have them and their sizes.

Paper capacity and trays: More is better. Although you're unlikely to be too bothered if you're at the machine when it runs out of paper, losing a fax because you weren't there to refill the paper tray can be very annoying. See the table for capacities. All can handle A4 as the maximum paper size and have paper in and out trays at the front (except the **EPSON**s, which have a rear in-tray and front out).

The **CANON Pixma**s have an additional in-tray at the back, which **CANON** claims effectively doubles the paper capacity we've listed. The **Pixma**s are the only models in this test that can handle printing on a CD. None of the products comes with an envelope feeder.

		10 FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS						
k costs score	Energy use when switched off (Wh)*	Direct photo printing	Duplex	OCR	Size (W x D x H, cm)**	Max print resolution (dpi)†	11 Max scan resolution (dpi)†	12 LCD size (mm)	Paper capacity (sheets)††	Warranty (years)	Price ($)‡
	11.52	C, PB	✓ (A)	✓	47 x 48 x 26	4800 x 1200	2400 x 4800	50 x 38 (B)	150	1	499
	13.80	PB	✓	✓	48 x 52 x 30	4800 x 1200	2400 x 4800	60 x 25	150 (C)	1	459
	13.62	PB	✓	✓	48 x 52 x 30	4800 x 1200	2400 x 4800	60 x 25	150 (C)	1	599
	10.32	C, PB	✓ (A)	✓	45 x 53 x 33	4800 x 1200	1200 x 2400	60 x 20	100	1	399
	0.61	C	✓ (A)		43 x 54 x 32	5760 x 1440	1200 x 2400	None	100	1	249
	0.62		✓ (A)		43 x 54 x 32	5760 x 1440	600 x 1200	None	100	1	199
	0.69	C	✓ (A)		45 x 57 x 32	5760 x 1440	1200 x 2400	60 x 18	150	1	399
	6.92	C, PB	✓ (A)	✓	44 x 51 x 17	4800 x 1200	1200 x 4800	35 x 27 (B)	100	1	349
	7.38	PB	✓ (A)	✓	38 x 49 x 29	4800 x 1200	1200 x 4800	49 x 13	150	1	499
	3.59	C	✓ (A)	✓	42 x 35 x 17	4800 x 1200	600 x 2400	None	100	1	199
	3.95	PB	✓ (A)	✓	42 x 35 x 17	4800 x 1200	600 x 2400	None	100	1	149
	7.09	C, PB	✓ (A)	✓	43 x 56 x 31	4800 x 1200	1200 x 2400	38 x 50 (B)	100	1	399
	7.41		✓ (A)	✓	44 x 52 x 31	4800 x 1200	600 x 2400	52 x 9	100	1	229
	0.00	C		✓	37 x 44 x 14	1200 x 6000	600 x 2400	50 x 9	100	1	199
	0.00	C		✓	37 x 44 x 14	1200 x 6000	600 x 2400	50 x 11	100	1	249

* *Measured with the product turned off, but still plugged in and switched on at the power point. See* A genuine turn-off, *page 24, for more on this.*

** *To the next centimetre. Measured with the product ready for operation (paper feed and paper out trays installed, paper loaded, controls accessible, flaps open if they would normally be open during operation).*

† *Dots per inch, as claimed by the manufacturer.*

†† *As claimed by the manufacturer for the main paper tray only. See* What to look for, *left, for more detail.*

‡ *Prices are recommended retail, as supplied by the manufacturer in February 2005.*

na *Not applicable: the product doesn't have this function.*

nt *Not tested (see* Ink costs, *page 25).*

(A) *Software only (see* What to look for *for more on this).*

(B) *Colour screen.*

(C) *Has a second feeder tray which effectively doubles the capacity, but it doesn't automatically switch between paper sources.*

1 Overall score

The overall score is made up as follows:

- Printing: 25%
- Copying: 20%
- Scanning: 15%
- Faxing: 5%
- Ease of use: 20%
- Versatility: 10%
- Environment: 5%

Where there's no fax function, the loading is redistributed equally across the other scores.

2 Printing score

This is a combination of scores for print speed and quality when printing a standard A4 business letter, colour spreadsheet, an A4 page with text, colour and greyscale pictures, a test pattern and a page of photographs.

3 Copying score

We copied a magazine page onto normal copy paper and assessed the output for quality and time to copy when operating both on its own and connected to the computer. We also copied a photograph onto photo-quality paper and assessed the output as above.

4 Scanning score

Our panel of experts appraised the output from scanning a standard A4 business letter, magazine pages and colour photographs against the output from a good-quality scanner. We also scanned a three-dimensional object to check the scanner's ability to handle objects that aren't perfectly flat (such as the spine in a book).

5 Faxing score

Scores were given for speed and quality when sending and receiving a standard A4 business letter and magazine pages.

6 Ease of use score

Our experts appraised the paper manuals, onscreen and online help, software installation, set-up, operation both standalone and with a computer, paper management, what safeguards are in place to ensure safety and guard against incorrect operation, maintenance, uninstalling software and how difficult it is to do two operations at once (such as printing while working at the computer or sending a fax).

7 Versatility score

Our experts checked the flexibility of such things as margins, settings for different paper and other media (such as CDs), duplex printing (see *What to look for* for more on this), the ability to switch between paper sources, and direct printing from cameras or other sources.

OCR (optical character recognition — see page 24 for more detail on this) was appraised using a standard A4 business letter, magazine pages and a spreadsheet.

8 Environment score

This is a combination of scores for noise during operation, power consumption, what advice was supplied regarding disposal of empty ink cartridges and an appraisal of how difficult it would be to recycle the device itself once its useful life is over.

9 Ink costs

A combined score for ink usage when printing B&W, colour pages and photos. See *Ink costs*, page 25, for more on this, and for why not all models have a score. This score isn't included in the overall score.

10 Features

- **Duplex** — printing on both sides of the paper (see *What to look for* for more on this).
- **Direct photo printing** — C indicates the device has slots for flash memory cards; PB indicates PictBridge-enabled (see *What to look for*).
- OCR — comes with OCR software. For those without you can buy OCR software separately. See page 24 for more on OCR.

11 Maximum scan resolution

For all practical purposes scanning reflective material (pictures and other documents) above 600 dpi is unlikely to give improved results.

12 LCD size

Our measurement of the usable screen area. A colour screen is useful when printing photos directly from flash memory cards.

SMART MARKETING

A new product on our supermarket shelves is **CSR Smart** sugar. Promoted as containing half the kilojoules of real sugar, it's claimed to provide a "50% reduction in calories per serving when compared with sugar".

But there's a catch. **CSR Smart** is 99.5% sugar, with artificial sweeteners acesulphame potassium and aspartame making up the other 0.5%. These have been added to provide extra sweetness, and the reason the product is claimed to provide half the kilojoules of sugar is that you're meant to use half the amount that you would of ordinary sugar to gain the same sweetness. If you use as much as you usually do, you'll still be getting the same amount of kilojoules.

While any means to cut kilojoules is welcome, and you might learn your lesson anyway after one extra-sweet cup of tea, it's another example of it paying to read the fine print first.

NATURALLY FULL OF SUGAR

The **NATURAL BEVERAGE COMPANY**'s range of soft drinks may not be the best choice to quench your children's thirst. 'Natural' they may be, but they contain around six teaspoons of sugar per one-cup (250 mL) serve. In fact, a cup of one of these drinks will give your child around a half to one teaspoon more sugar than a cup of Coke, and only slightly less than a cup of Fanta.

While these drinks may help limit the amount of artificial colours and flavours your children consume, the empty kilojoules that sugar-ridden beverages like these provide are one aspect blamed for kids' growing rates of obesity. And don't forget the effect sugar has on their teeth.

If you're after a drink free from artificial additives, water and milk (reduced-fat for children older than two) are still the best choice. Leave the soft drinks for an occasional treat.

CHOICE HOME TESTER

Looking for the best teabag

Many of life's dilemmas have been sorted out over a good cuppa, and one of those dilemmas need no longer be which brand of teabag to buy, thanks to around 270 CHOICE Home Testers. To find the most satisfying brew they sipped their way through the 13 brands of English Breakfast teabags we found in our survey of supermarkets. Each taster rated seven brands of tea for taste and then gave it an overall score.

What's surprising is that there's so little between the scores. Apart from one decaffeinated tea that came bottom (which perhaps isn't surprising), there was only a range of 53–59% in the tasters' ratings.

DILMAH, LIPTON and **MADURA** scraped in at the top, described by the tasters as smooth and refreshing. But with so little separating all the brands, you don't need to go further than our Best Buy, **HOME BRAND English Breakfast** teabags. With the equal second-highest rating, and at just $2.60 for 100 bags, you'll find your cuppa even easier to swallow.

Harder to swallow was the fact that the most expensive brands in the trial were no better liked, despite costing more than five times as much as our Best Buy. The table (right) has the full results.

And a big thanks to our Home Testers for taking their tea break a bit more seriously to help us out.

PHOTOS: TAMARA GRAHAM

ENGLISH BREAKFAST TEABAGS

Brand (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Price per 100 teabags ($)
DILMAH	59	7.98
LIPTON	59	6.70
MADURA	59	6.44
HOME BRAND ◀ BEST BUY	58	2.60
TWININGS	58	7.96
NATURE'S CUPPA	57	9.66
WILLIAMSON & MAGOR	57	15.00
IGA COURTYARD	56	4.32
COLES FARMLAND	54	4.99
DIPLOMAT ESTATE (Aldi)	54	3.98
PLANET ORGANIC	53	15.40
TAYLORS OF HARROGATE	53	19.50
TWININGS Decaffeinated	47	23.56

Under pressure?

If your doctor wants you to check your blood pressure at home, which monitor won't let you down?

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Automatic blood pressure monitors** *used on the arm rather than the wrist generally worked the best in our test.*
- **Don't use a blood pressure monitor** *to self-diagnose and adjust your own medication — always use it in consultation with your GP.*

We're all under pressure. And that's generally reassuring, because it means our heart is still pumping blood through our body. But for one in seven Australian adults there's too much of a good thing — they suffer from some form of high blood pressure, or hypertension (as it's known medically).

If you're one of them, monitoring your condition regularly at home with a blood pressure monitor can be useful (see *Should you get a blood pressure monitor?*, page 30).

THE MONITORS

We assessed the accuracy, consistency and ease of use of 18 blood pressure monitors between $95 and $240.

There are three types: automatic arm, automatic wrist and manual arm. Automatic models inflate the cuff automatically, whereas manual models require you to inflate it yourself by pumping a bulb.

Most arm models measured blood pressure within their claimed accuracy. However, all but one of the wrist monitors (the **OMRON R5**, which was one of the best overall) were much less accurate, and we can't recommend them.

Most monitors are quite easy to use.

WHAT'S BLOOD PRESSURE?

Blood pressure is created by the heart pumping blood through the arteries. It's measured as two numbers, in millimetres of mercury (mmHg) based on the

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WHAT TO BUY

AND UA-767	$135
CITIZEN CH-403C	$175
OMRON R5	$160
AND UA-767 Plus	$150
OMRON T5	$160
OMRON T8	$240

WHAT'S NORMAL AND WHAT'S HIGH?

Blood pressure (mmHg)	Diagnosis
Up to 120/80	Optimal
Up to 130/85	Normal
Up to 140/90	High normal
Up to 160/100	Mild hypertension
Up to 180/110	Moderate hypertension
Above 180/110	Severe hypertension

WHO definitions

standard method using a mercury sphygmomanometer (the machine your doctor uses in their surgery) and a stethoscope — giving a result such as '120 over 80' (120/80 mmHg).

The higher figure is the systolic pressure, caused by the contracting (beating) heart. The lower figure is called diastolic, and is the pressure between beats, when the heart relaxes.

The table, above, shows what the World Health Organization (WHO) defines as normal and high blood pressure. Hypertension can increase the risk of heart attack, stroke, heart failure and kidney disease, but doesn't necessarily do so. When weighing up your risk, your GP will also consider factors such as your age, sex, family history and weight, and whether you smoke.

There usually aren't any symptoms that indicate high blood pressure. So you may have it but not be aware of it — that's why the disease is often called 'the silent killer'.

Your lifestyle can have an impact on your blood pressure. To prevent hypertension or to manage it once you've been diagnosed:

- Have regular check-ups, especially when you know you have high blood pressure.
- Don't smoke.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Exercise regularly (but note that there are certain sports to avoid when you have high blood pressure, such as lifting heavy weights). Consider stress-reducing techniques such as yoga and meditation.
- Avoid salty and fatty foods, and reduce your consumption of red meat.
- Eat plenty of cereals, fish, fruit and vegetables.
- Achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.
- If lifestyle changes don't lower your blood pressure enough, your doctor may prescribe medication. Make sure you take it, and don't adjust the dosage yourself based on your own blood pressure measurements. This is known as 'self-diagnosis', and fiddling with your medication yourself can have serious consequences.

LOW PRESSURE

If you have low blood pressure, you probably won't have to do anything about it. While it may cause some people to faint or feel tired, most don't have any associated health problems.

SHOULD YOU GET A BLOOD PRESSURE MONITOR?

If you've been diagnosed with hypertension, discuss with your GP whether you should measure your blood pressure at home, how often and at what times. It may have several benefits:

- It can help give you a better understanding of your condition, and motivate you to lower your blood pressure by changing your lifestyle.
- It provides your GP with additional measurements that they can use to monitor your condition or adjust your medication.
- Some people can't help getting nervous when visiting a doctor, which increases their blood pressure: it's called 'white-coat hypertension'. If this happens to you, measuring blood pressure in the more relaxed environment of your home may be a better way for you to get accurate readings.

How to measure blood pressure

Your blood pressure can vary by 30 to 50 mmHg over a day. It's influenced by a range of things — for example, by what you've been eating or drinking, your emotional state, your level of activity, or even whether you're standing, sitting or lying down.

It's higher if you're stressed, have had a caffeinated drink and after exercise. It's usually higher in the afternoon than in the morning. And it gets higher as you get older.

So in order to get comparable measurements, you need to measure your blood pressure at the same time of day and under the same conditions every time.

When you first get your blood pressure monitor, take it to your GP to have it checked against a sphygmomanometer (so you know whether it's accurate or you have to adjust its readings for error), and to have your GP check your measurement technique. Repeat this every six months or so.

Discuss with your GP how often and at what time you should measure your blood pressure.

Here's the commonly recommended method:

- Don't exercise, have a bath, smoke or drink coffee, tea, cola or other stimulating drinks for a couple of hours before you want to take a measurement.
- Sit at a table.
- Take off anything that may interfere with the measurement (such as your watch or jewellery), and bare your arm or wrist (depending on the type of monitor you're using).
- Make sure you're comfortable and relax for a few minutes.
- If you're using an arm monitor, put on the cuff so that its centre is at heart height. Rest your arm on the table.
- If you're using a wrist monitor, put on the cuff and raise the wrist to heart height.
- Following the monitor's instructions, take two measurements within a couple of minutes of each other. If they differ by more than 10 mmHg, take a third.
- Keep a record of all results, including any events that might explain an unusual result (for example, if you had an argument with somebody earlier that day, or if the grandkids were running around you while you took the measurement).

Profiles

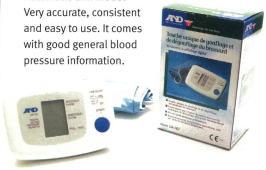
The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in March 2005.

AND UA-767

Price: $135

Automatic arm model

Very accurate, consistent and easy to use. It comes with good general blood pressure information.

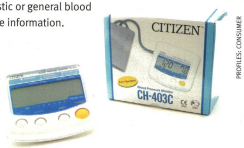


CITIZEN CH-403C

Price: $175

Automatic arm model

Very accurate, consistent model, but not as easy to use as the others, and comes without any diagnostic or general blood pressure information.

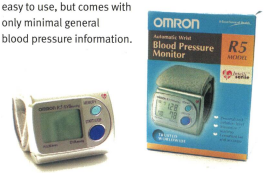


OMRON R5

Price: $160

Automatic wrist model

The only wrist monitor with comparable accuracy to the arm models tested. It's also consistent and very easy to use, but comes with only minimal general blood pressure information.

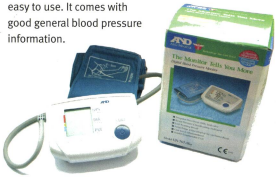


AND UA-767 PLUS

Price: $150

Automatic arm model

Accurate, consistent and very easy to use. It comes with good general blood pressure information.



OMRON T5

Price: $160

Automatic arm model

Very accurate, consistent and easy to use, but comes with only minimal general blood pressure information.

OMRON T8

Price: $240

Automatic arm model

Very accurate and easy to use, but not as consistent as some of the others, and comparatively expensive.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- The models in the *What to buy* list are the best overall, but the six that follow them in the table (page 32) are nearly as good and are also worth considering.
- The bottom six models in the table were let down by their accuracy.

WHAT CUFF SIZE DO YOU NEED?

Wrist monitors usually come in only one cuff size. In order to get the right cuff size for an arm model, you need to measure your arm's circumference halfway between your shoulder and elbow, while standing with your arm hanging at your side.

A circumference of 18–22 cm requires a small cuff, 22–32 cm a medium cuff, and above 32 cm a large cuff.

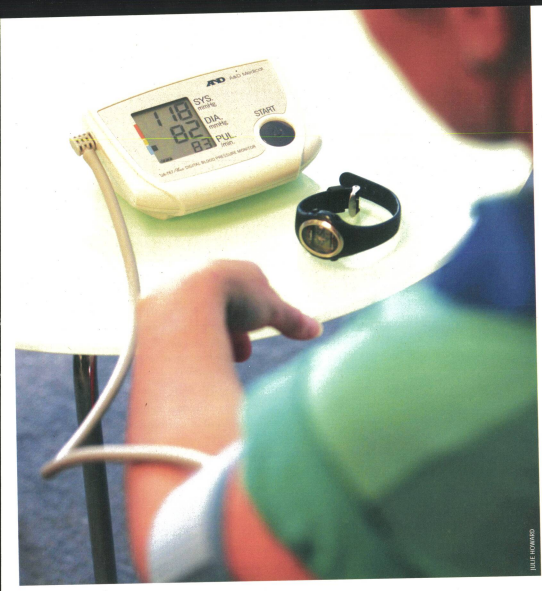
What to look for

- Buy from a **pharmacy** or **medical equipment supplier**, where you can get proper advice and a demonstration of how to use the monitor.
- **Arm** monitors are generally more accurate than **wrist** models — in our test, only one wrist model could match them.
- If you buy an arm monitor, measure your arm size to get the **right-size cuff** (see left).
- Make sure the monitor's **keys and display** are easy to read.
- Models that inflate the cuff **automatically** tend to work better than those requiring you to do it manually (by pumping a bulb), though there are exceptions.
- The cuff has to be inflated to a level above the systolic blood pressure. However, the automatic setting on the monitor may be a lot higher, and you may find it uncomfortable. Models with **adjustable inflation level** allow you to program the pressure to one that's comfortable for you. Models with **fuzzy logic** detect the ideal inflation level automatically.
- If a monitor has a **memory** to store a number of your recent blood pressure measurements, it can be helpful as a back-up. However, it's a good idea to record all measurements separately, so that you and your GP get a sufficient history.
- Manufacturers give different advice regarding the use of **rechargeable batteries** — check in the shop before you buy.
- While you should use a blood pressure monitor in co-operation with your GP, it's still very helpful if the monitor comes with good **general background information** on blood pressure issues, for your reference.

Features and functions they all have

- Instructions.
- Diagnostic information about which range of values constitute normal and high blood pressure (except the **CITIZEN CH-403C**). The information on all but the **CITIZEN CH-656C** and **OMRON M2** is based on recommendations by the World Health Organization (see *What's normal and what's high?*, page 30).
- LCD display.
- Pulse rate measurement.

	PERFORMANCE				4 FEATURES				
Brand / model (in rank order)	**1 Overall score** (%)	**2 Accuracy score** (%)	**2 Consistency score** (%)	**3 Ease of use score** (%)	**Automatic**	**Adjustable inflation level**	**Fuzzy logic**	**Memory** (previous readings stored)	**Blood pressure info**	**Storage**
AND UA-767 **(A)**	80	87	73	80	✓	✓		0	✓	
CITIZEN CH-403C	79	93	71	65	✓	✓	✓	7		✓
OMRON R5 **(B)**	79	79	75	86	✓		✓	7	**(G)**	✓
AND UA-767 Plus	78	79	73	88	✓			1	✓	✓
OMRON T5 **(B)**	78	81	74	79	✓		✓	0	**(G)**	✓
OMRON T8 **(B)**	78	84	68	85	✓	✓	✓	14	✓	✓
OMRON M2 **(C)**	76	84	73	66		✓ **(F)**		14	✓	
SAMSUNG SBM-500S	76	76	69	88	✓	✓		8	✓	✓
SAMSUNG SBM-300F **(D)**	75	85	60	83	✓		✓	8	✓	✓
CITIZEN CH-485E	74	78	64	84	✓			30	**(G)**	
SAMSUNG SBM-600M	74	79	65	84		✓ **(F)**		8	✓	✓
AND UA-704	73	73	68	83		✓ **(F)**		0	✓	
CITIZEN CH-308B **(E)**	69	68	67	77		✓ **(F)**		1	**(G)**	
AND UA-779	67	53	72	87	✓	✓	✓	7	✓	✓
CITIZEN CH-656C **(E)**	64	47	73	82	✓		✓	7		✓
AND UB-328 **(E)**	63	44	70	87	✓	✓		7	✓	✓
OREGON SCIENTIFIC BPW128 **(E)**	60	35	76	76	✓		✓	30	**(G)**	✓
SAMSUNG SBM-200TA **(E)**	58	25	77	86	✓		✓	40	✓	✓



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SPECIFICATIONS

Type	Batteries needed	Warranty (years)	Origin	Price ($)*
Arm	4 x AA	2	Japan	135
Arm	4 x AA	1	Japan	175
Wrist	2 x AAA	2	China	160
Arm	4 x AA	Lifetime **(H)**	Japan	150
Arm	4 x AA	2	China	160
Arm	4 x AA	2	China	240
Arm	4 x AA	2	China	115
Arm	4 x AA	2	Korea	163
Arm	4 x AA	2	Korea	183
Arm	4 x AA	1	Japan	230
Arm	4 x AA	2	Korea	117
Arm	1 x AA	2	Japan	95
Arm	4 x AA	1	Japan	120
Arm	4 x AA	2	Japan	170
Wrist	2 x AAA	1	Japan / HK	195
Wrist	2 x AAA	2	Japan	185
Wrist	2 x AAA	1	HK	129
Wrist	2 x AAA	2	Korea	196

* *Recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in March 2005.*

(A) *Also available with PC connection (UA-767PC, $322) and voice function (your results are announced; UA-767V, $327).*

(B) *The manufacturer says this model will be discontinued in June 2005.*

(C) *Also available in an automatic version: M5, $130.*

(D) *Similar to the SBM-400F ($135), which has a two-row LCD screen instead of a three-row one.*

(E) *Didn't achieve the claimed accuracy for both systolic and diastolic measurements.*

(F) *This is a manual model, so you can always inflate the cuff to a comfortable level.*

(G) *Minimal.*

(H) *The model is guaranteed to last for the lifetime of its original owner.*

1 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of accuracy, consistency and ease of use, weighted as follows:

- Accuracy: 40%.
- Consistency: 40%.
- Ease of use: 20%.

2 Accuracy and consistency scores

We took multiple readings on trialists with low, normal and high blood pressure, both with the blood pressure monitors and with a sphygmomanometer (which is considered the standard method for measuring blood pressure).

- The **accuracy score** is based on the average difference between the results of the monitor and the standard method. Most monitors provided results within ±3 mmHg, which is the accuracy claimed for most of them. We think an average difference of more than twice that (more than 6 mmHg) is poor, and scored such results 25% or less.
- For the **consistency score**, we looked at the statistical variation of the differences. If a monitor is inaccurate, but by a consistent amount, you can mentally adjust for it. If it's inconsistently inaccurate it's hard to use it effectively at all.

3 Ease of use score

Each monitor was assessed by six trialists, who used them twice daily for three days and scored the:

- Quality of instructions.
- Fitting and operating.
- Comfort.
- Display and keys.
- Blood pressure information provided with the monitor.

The results were weighted equally and converted into a score.

4 Features

See *What to look for*, above left, for explanations of these.

As seen on TV

We found plenty of 51 cm TVs worthy of a night in front of the box.

IN A NUTSHELL

On test: a dozen 51 cm *TVs ranging in price from around $300–$560.*

There's not much *innovation happening in this sector of the TV market, but for a good range of standard features and a decent TV-watching experience the models in the* What to buy *list (see below) are solid picks.*

They may not have the 'wow' factor of a widescreen or plasma TV, but 51 cm models are still the source of entertainment for a large number of households, and they're a good size for a smaller living room or as a second TV. With the large number of brands available, it shouldn't be hard to find one to keep you company on a quiet night in.

To help out, we looked at 12 models on the market. As well as the usual tests for sound and picture quality and ease of use, we tested stability as a follow-up to our reports on the dangers of toppling TVs (see CHOICE, October 2004, and the update in March 2005), and we're pleased to say that all models passed. But just to be on the safe side, it's still a good idea to place any TV on an even surface whose size matches the TV's footprint, on a stable stand or in a cabinet.

While we tested models ranging in recommended retail price from $299 to $561, none of the top five models in the test (see *What to buy*, below) has a recommended retail price of less than $449. With most of the focus now on the higher end of the TV market, we wonder whether this size bracket is no longer an interesting competitive market for manufacturers, and you simply have to pay more for better quality.

THE BEST VIEW IN THE HOUSE

Although 51 cm is a relatively small screen these days, you still need to be a certain distance away from the set for the best view. A good rule of thumb for any standard (4:3 screen ratio) TV is around five times the diagonal screen size, which for 51 cm TVs is around two and a half metres.

While most of the picture features on the TVs tested help to improve your viewing experience, **aspect ratio control** — a feature on five of the models — isn't one of them (the **SONY, PHILIPS, SAMSUNG, NEC** and **ROWA** have it). It allows you to adjust the width-to-height ratio of the picture if you're viewing wide-format (16:9) images, where the width is considerably greater than the height compared to normal 4:3 format. It may work with bigger screens, but on these models it merely distorts the images.

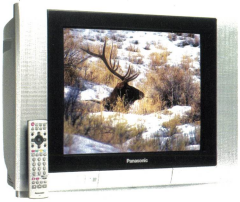
AUSTRAL PRESS

WHAT TO BUY

SONY KV AR212	$549
PANASONIC TX-21FJ50A	$549
SHARP SX51QF7	$549
PHILIPS 21PT4323/79R	$519
SAMSUNG CS-21M20MH ◀ BEST BUY ▶	$449

PROFILES

Models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order. Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in March 2005.



PROFILES: GEOFF AMBLER

SONY KV AR212

Price: $549

Good points

- Best overall.
- Good picture and sound quality.
- Easy to use.
- Excellent standby energy performance.
- Tilt control.
- Sound widening or equivalent surround sound effect.
- Child lock.
- On timer.
- S-video and component video inputs.
- Headphones socket.
- The composite video inputs accessible from the front are independent of the rear ones, letting you easily plug in an extra video source, such as a camcorder.

Bad points

- No automatic standby after a few minutes when no broadcast is received.
- Labels for onboard controls are hard to read.

PANASONIC TX-21FJ50A

Price: $549

Good points

- Good picture and sound quality.
- Sound widening or equivalent surround sound effect.
- Child lock.
- Teletext.
- The manufacturer says the remote control can also control some **PANASONIC** VCRs and DVD players.
- Component video input.
- Headphones socket.
- The composite video inputs accessible from the front are independent of the rear ones.

Bad points

- None to mention.

SHARP SX51QF7

Price: $549

Good points

- Good picture quality.
- Easy to use, particularly the remote control.
- Sound widening or equivalent surround sound effect.
- Reminder timer.
- On timer.
- Component video input.
- Headphones socket.
- The composite video inputs accessible from the front are independent of the rear ones.

Bad points

- The worst sound quality of the five models in the *What to buy* list.
- You have to use the onboard controls rather than the remote control to tune and set up channels.

Profiles continued overleaf

FESTIVAL PRESS

Profiles, continued

PHILIPS 21PT4323/79R

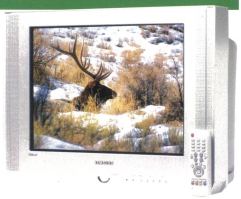
Price: $519

Good points

- Good picture quality.
- Excellent standby energy performance.
- Sound widening or equivalent surround sound effect.
- Teletext.
- S-video and component video inputs.
- Headphones socket.
- The composite video inputs accessible from the front are independent of the rear ones.

Bad points

- Labels for onboard controls are hard to read.
- No menu access key on onboard controls.



SAMSUNG CS-21M20MH

Price: $449 BEST BUY

Good points

- Good picture quality.
- Easy to use.
- Child lock.
- On timer.
- Teletext.
- Component video input.
- Headphones socket.

Bad points

- No manual fine-tuning of channels to get the best possible picture.
- No menu access key on onboard controls.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- The **NEC** has good picture quality but is let down by its sound quality, described by testers as "plain and hollow".
- The **SANYO** lacks some useful features, has unimpressive sound and received only mid-range scores in most tests.
- The **TEAC** has good picture quality but its sound quality is relatively poor and it lacks some useful features.
- The **KONKA** has some problems with picture quality (the picture is slightly dark and blurry), mediocre sound, and the onscreen display text is small and doesn't stand out well against the background.
- The picture on the **LG** has a noticeably reddish tinge, and there's no manual fine-tuning.
- The **PALSONIC** has a reasonable range of features, but its picture quality score is relatively low and it ranked bottom for sound quality.
- The **ROWA** scored relatively low for picture quality and its standby energy performance was the worst in the test.

	PERFORMANCE					6 FEATURES				
Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Picture quality score (%)	3 Sound quality score (%)	4 Ease of use score (%)	5 Standby energy score (%)	Composite video (AV) input accessible from the front	Full stereo input	Teletext	Child lock	S-video input
SONY KV AR212	79	80	72	73	100	✓	✓		✓	✓
PANASONIC TX-21FJ50A **(A)**	77	79	78	66	90	✓	✓	✓	✓	
SHARP SX51QF7	76	79	61	77	90	✓	✓			
PHILIPS 21PT4323/79R	73	73	68	64	100	✓ **(B)**	✓	✓		✓
SAMSUNG CS-21M20MH	73	72	69	70	90	✓ **(B) (C)**	✓	✓	✓	
NEC PF-51T32	70	79	46	63	90	✓	✓	✓	✓	
SANYO CP21AF1V	67	69	58	65	80	✓ **(C)**	AV only		✓	
TEAC CT-F5151	67	71	51	63	90	✓ **(B) (C)**	AV only			
KONKA KP2162EX	65	66	59	64	70	✓ **(B)**	AV only			✓
LG RT-21FA35RX	62	64	55	62	70	✓	✓	✓	✓	
PALSONIC S125PF	61	63	45	65	70	✓ **(B)**	AV only			✓
ROWA R5129	61	63	61	60	50	✓	✓		✓	

* *Rounded up to the next centimetre; all protruding parts except the cord included.*

** *Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in March 2005.*

(A) *Discontinued, but may still be available in some stores.*

(B) *The sockets are located at the side of the TV close to the front, rather than right at the front. Access may be restricted if the TV is in a cabinet.*

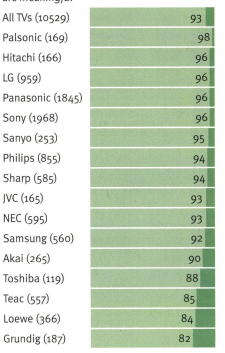
(C) *The inputs accessible from the front aren't independent of the rear ones — they're not an extra input, just the same one(s) from a different place.*

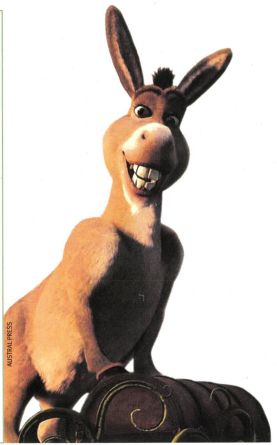
How reliable have subscribers found them?

We asked subscribers whether their TV (varying sizes and types, not just 51 cm models, bought in or after 1996) had needed repairs in the previous 12 months. Analysis was limited to brands with more than 100 responses (the exact number is in brackets).

Overall, just 7% of TVs had needed repair in the previous 12 months, making them a comparatively reliable appliance. The graph on the right shows the results for TVs of all sizes, but our survey in fact found that larger TVs, particularly those over 80 cm, tend to be less reliable than smaller ones.

Differences of 9% or more between brands are meaningful




AUSTRALPRESS

SPECIFICATIONS

mponent leo input	Dimensions (H x W x D, cm)*	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)**
	47 x 59 x 48	1 **(D)**	Malaysia	Sony	549
	48 x 65 x 49	1 **(E)**	Malaysia	Panasonic	549
	47 x 62 x 49	1	Malaysia	Sharp	549
	47 x 60 x 51	3	China	Philips	519
	46 x 58 x 51	1	Thailand	Samsung	449
	48 x 60 x 48	1	Korea	NEC	429
	46 x 59 x 49	1	Indonesia	Sanyo	299
	46 x 61 x 51	1	China	Teac	299
	46 x 61 x 48	3	China	Pebble	299
	47 x 63 x 49	1	Thailand	LG	561
	45 x 59 x 48	1	China	Palsonic	359
	46 x 61 x 48	3	China	Rowa	299

(D) *$130 for extra four years.*
(E) *$80 for extra two years; $110 for extra four years.*

1 Overall score
The overall score is a combination of the following:
- Picture quality: 50%
- Sound quality: 20%
- Ease of use: 20%
- Standby energy consumption: 10%

2 Picture quality score
This score is the combination of a:
- Visual evaluation of movies: 80%
- Visual and geometric evaluation of picture patterns: 20%

3 Sound quality score
This is a combination of a:
- General listening assessment: 80%
- Technical sound test, measuring the sound for frequency range, frequency response and smoothness: 20%

4 Ease of use score
This is made up of:
- Remote control: 50%
- Tuning and setting up of channels: 20%
- Onscreen display user-friendliness: 20%
- Onboard controls: 10%

5 Standby energy score
This looks at the energy used when on standby (when the TV's turned off by the remote control but is still connected to power). The lower the usage, the higher the score. The score is based on the TV being on standby for 19 hours a day and watched for the rest of the time. The cost can be as little as $1 a year to around $10, but with thousands of TVs left on standby across the country every day, there's also a substantial amount of electricity wasted and carbon dioxide unnecessarily produced.

6 Features
See *What to look for*, page 38, for an explanation of these and other features.

What to look for

The three most important things to assess when buying a TV are picture quality, sound quality and ease of use. Then look for the features that are important to you.

Picture quality: Watch the set for a while in the shop, looking at all the available channels so you see a variety of images. You may need to adjust the picture controls (colour, contrast, brightness and sharpness) if the image is too bright, too dull, lacking in colour or the colours are unnaturally strong. Ask the salesperson for help if you're unsure. If you find a control needs to be set to maximum to get the best picture, be wary — you may not be able to adjust it as required when the TV ages.

If possible, find a 'talking head' to watch, such as a presenter. This lets you see how natural the skin tone is, and the hair will allow you to judge how well fine details are reproduced.

Look at all areas of the screen, not just the centre. Make sure the image isn't blurred or distorted in the centre or the corners.

Sound quality: A shop isn't the best environment for checking sound quality, as the ambient noise can mask some undesirable sounds. Even so, turn up the volume and listen for any noticeable distortion. Also check the position of the speakers: some sets have them facing out from the sides of the TV, which could muffle the sound if you're intending to put it in a cabinet. On all the models in this test the speakers face the front.

Ease of use: Play with the controls, especially the remote, and make sure the more commonly used buttons (volume, channel selector, standby and mute) are prominently positioned and easy to operate. Ideally, these buttons should be a different shape or size from the rest so you can locate them easily by touch only.

A good instruction manual is invaluable. Ask to see it, and check that it's well written and easy to read. Diagrams should clearly show the location and functions for all the controls, and the steps for any function should be clear and easy to follow.

FEATURES ALL THE TESTED MODELS HAVE

Picture controls for adjusting contrast, brightness, colour and sharpness.

Preset and user-settable picture settings. These are a group of settings of the picture controls that are stored in the TV's memory, either at the factory or by you. At the touch of a button you can change settings to suit your viewing environment (a sunny room or at night with the lights off, say) or preferences (perhaps bright or muted colours), without having to fiddle with individual controls.

NTSC-compatible video inputs. This means you can play material (videos, DVDs, etc) formatted for the US colour picture system, different from the PAL system used in Australia.

Mute button on remote control.

Stereo-capable audio (AV) inputs, which means the TV plays sound in stereo when connected to a stereo-capable video or DVD, but can't receive TV broadcasts in stereo. Also see *Full stereo*, above right.

Automatic and manual channel tuning.

Channel skip (or equivalent), which lets you remove unassigned and unwanted channels temporarily, so they're bypassed when selecting channels with the up and down buttons.

Off timer, which switches the TV off at a set time.

Composite (AV) video input sockets at both back and front of the TV. All modern TVs have composite (the most basic) video input for connecting videos, DVD players, etc, to the TV. Having front inputs as well provides an easy way to connect a temporary item such as a camcorder. It's even better if the front input is independent of the rear one, as connected equipment (DVD, video, camcorder, etc) can then operate on different channels, making it more convenient when switching from one to the other. (This is the case with all models except the **SAMSUNG**, **SANYO** and **TEAC**).

FEATURES MOST OF THE TESTED MODELS HAVE

Manual fine tuning (except the **SAMSUNG** and **LG**).

Automatic standby after a few minutes when no broadcast signal is received (all models except the **SONY**).

Previous channel button: Allows you to return to the last channel viewed (all models except the **NEC**).

USEFUL FEATURES

See the table, page 36, for details of which models have the following features:

Full-stereo TVs can receive broadcasts in stereo (they have a stereo tuner) and have stereo AV inputs as well. TVs that have AV stereo input only can play a video or DVD in stereo, but can't receive TV broadcasts in stereo.

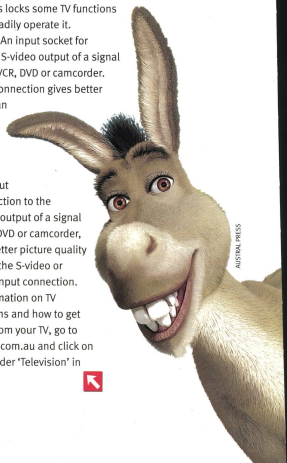
Teletext. The TV can be used to receive, decode and display on the screen text information like the weather, time and a TV guide, as well as subtitles ('closed captions').

Child lock. This locks some TV functions so a child can't readily operate it.

S-video input: An input socket for connection to the S-video output of a signal source such as a VCR, DVD or camcorder. It's claimed this connection gives better picture quality than composite input (see above).

Component video input: Another set of input sockets for connection to the component video output of a signal source such as a DVD or camcorder, claimed to give better picture quality again than either the S-video or composite video input connection.

For more information on TV connection systems and how to get the best picture from your TV, go to www.choice extra.com.au and click on '68 cm Nov 03' under 'Television' in the index.



PHOTOLIBRARY

TIME FOR A NEW FRIDGE?

Tough new energy regulations have made the new breed of fridges much more energy-efficient.

IN A NUTSHELL

All 11 fridges that made it through our latest test conform to the new, tougher energy standards, but not all are problem-free.

We had an uncharacteristically high number of faulty fridges in the test. If you suspect your fridge doesn't work as well as it should, contact the manufacturer.

WHAT TO BUY

	200–299 L		
	WESTINGHOUSE RJ282V (T)		$829
	300–375 L		
New	FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E372B (B)		$1299
New	SAMSUNG Cool n' Cool SRL316NW (B)	BEST BUY	$999
	WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V (T)		$1099
	376–450 L		
	WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ425V (T)		$1409
New	FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E440T (T)		$1399
	WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ395V (T)		$1309
New	FISHER & PAYKEL Tasman E442B (B)		$1399
	451–525 L		
New	FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E521T (T)		$1549
	WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ525 (T)	BEST BUY	$1929
New	ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR NB510J (B)		$1779
New	FISHER & PAYKEL Elegance E522B (B)		$1599
	More than 525 L		
	SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW (B)		$1999
	Side-by-side		
	WHIRLPOOL Gold 6GD22DCXHW		$3799

(T) Top freezer; (B) Bottom freezer

All these fridges are good, while **Best Buys** are comparatively cheaper in their size range both to buy and run.

A good fridge/freezer should do more than keep your food safe — it should also be energy-efficient. As it's working non-stop, the energy it consumes adds up.

For some years now Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS) have been in place, which every new fridge sold in Australia must meet. These are mandatory standards and — especially the revised, tougher MEPS that came into force in January this year — have brought significant improvements in energy efficiency. They've also changed the market considerably, as many of the fridges sold about a year ago wouldn't pass the new standards and are being replaced with new models.

So for this test we bought 12 fridges, all new on the market late last year and likely to pass the new standards. And pass they did, with flying colours. All are indeed a lot more energy-efficient — some even use much less energy than required by the standards. But unfortunately the fridges didn't impress all round.

PROBLEMS, PROBLEMS

An uncharacteristically high number had faults requiring at least one service call. Not all these faults rendered the fridges in question unworkable, but they didn't work as well as they should have. For example:

- The **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR N510J** arrived with a large dent in the door, and its replacement — as well as some other

EXTRA INFO

For a general guide to what to look for in a fridge and more information on features and accessories, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on any of the articles under 'Fridges' in the index. With our 'Compare-a-product' feature you can also get help choosing a model that'll suit your requirements.

If you don't have access to the internet, our articles in November 2003 and 2002 give general information about what to look for in a fridge. If you don't have these back issues and you're a personal subscriber to CHOICE, please phone our Consumer Services people on 1800 069 552 and ask them to send you a copy.

ELECTROLUX fridges (**KELVINATOR** and **SIMPSON** brands) — had a faulty control/rear duct assembly. (That's a large plastic section that forms most of the back wall of the fridge compartment. It contains the thermostat and baffle controls and forms the duct that distributes air down the back wall.) After **ELECTROLUX** supplied replacement parts, some of these fridges worked properly. However, the **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR NB380J** still had a limited temperature range (the fresh-food compartment failed to get very cold on the coldest setting).

Another problem with some **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR** models is that if you move the thermostat knob to what you'd think is the coolest position, against a definite stop, it isn't as far as the knob can go. You've hit a 'partial movement limiter' and might not realise that you have to push the knob a quarter of a turn further if you want the fresh-food compartment colder. See the photo, below, for what we mean.

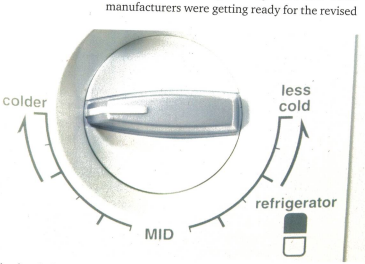
The **FISHER & PAYKEL E331T**'s maintenance of appropriate temperatures was very erratic and the fault couldn't be repaired. Since a replacement fridge wasn't available in time for testing, we dropped this model from our tests, which is why we're only reporting on 11 instead of 12 new models.

HAVE YOU BOUGHT A LEMON?

We think it's likely some of the fridges we bought were early production units with teething problems, considering we bought at a time when manufacturers were getting ready for the revised MEPS requirements. But you too may have bought a fridge when we did, and it may have the same faults, but would you know?

The best advice we can give to check whether your fridge is working as it should is to buy a food or fridge thermometer (from a kitchen or catering supply shop, hardware or electrical store) and monitor temperatures in the fresh-food and freezer compartments. A fridge should be able to achieve –18°C and 3°C simultaneously in the freezer and fresh-food compartments respectively in cool to warm environments. If your new fridge has problems reaching or maintaining these temperatures, contact the manufacturer.

For more on fridge thermometers and how to use one, see CHOICE, November 2001, or go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on any of the links under 'Fridges' in the index.



GEOFF AMBLER

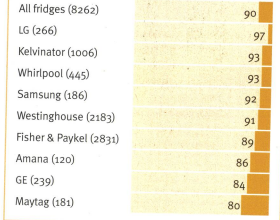
An example of confusing controls on some of the Electrolux Kelvinator models. First of all you don't know whether this is the thermostat or the baffle, which control, respectively, the cooling effort and the cold air flow between compartments. And then the fridge compartment mightn't get cold enough unless you turn the knob past the horizontal position labelled 'colder', where on some models you feel a definite stop, to a vertical position. We don't understand what the point of this movement limiter is and fear some people's fresh-food compartment simply won't get cold enough because the control will be wrongly set.

How reliable have subscribers found them?

Fridges are comparatively reliable overall. Of the around 8000 subscribers who told us about their fridge (bought in or after 1996) in our recent reliability survey, 10% of fridges had needed repair in the previous 12 months. (Note that these are probably largely not fridges that had to comply with the new MEPS.) But there was a sliding scale here: only 7% of fridges with a volume of less than 300 L had needed repair, while 13% of people owning one of the bigger models (over 500 L) had to call in the repairer.

The graph below shows the results for brands for which we received sufficient replies (at least 100). The numbers in brackets show the number of responses. A difference of 6% or more between brands is meaningful.

PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR



Profiles

New models in the *What to buy* list are profiled here in rank order within their size range. For profiles of the other models in the *What to buy* list see CHOICE, November 2004, or June 2004 (for smaller fridges), November 2003 (for side-by-side models) and May 2003 (for extra-large fridges). You'll also find them in the appropriate month under 'Fridges' in the www.choiceextra.com.au index.

PROFILES: GEOFF AMBLER

300–375 L

FISHER & PAYKEL ELEGANCE E372B

Price: $1299

Glass shelves in the fridge and plastic drawers in the bottom-mounted freezer.

GOOD POINTS

- Good temperatures on 'mid' setting.
- Handles external temperature changes excellently.
- Very good crisper humidity, so your vegies should stay fresh longer.
- Electronic temperature management, with good pushbutton controls.
- Controls allow a good range of temperature combinations between fridge and freezer.
- An alarm sounds when doors are left open or a fault is detected.

BAD POINTS

- Fresh-food cool-down time is a bit longer than for other models in this size range.
- Moderate temperature fluctuations as the compressor stops and starts.
- The crisper's lid, which is vital for maintaining humidity, sometimes fails to seal properly, in which case the crisper won't keep vegies as fresh. (The manufacturer tells us it's addressed this concern with a new crisper design that fridges will have from September 2005.)
- No chiller compartment.

SAMSUNG COOL N' COOL SRL316NW

Price: $999 BEST BUY

Tall fridge with glass shelves in the fresh-food area and plastic drawers in the bottom-mounted freezer.

GOOD POINTS

- Good temperatures on 'mid' setting.
- Good temperature uniformity within compartments.
- Handles external temperature changes very well.
- Electronic temperature management, with good pushbutton controls that show temperatures.
- Good storage versatility.
- 'Quick freeze' and 'quick chill' features.
- An alarm sounds when the fridge (not freezer) door is left open.

BAD POINTS

- The range of desirable temperature settings is limited.
- The plastic crisper and freezer drawers don't always slide freely.
- No dairy compartment.
- No chiller compartment.

376–450 L

FISHER & PAYKEL ELEGANCE E440T

Price: $1399

Glass shelves and a wire bottle rack in the fridge, and wire shelves in the relatively small top-mounted freezer.

GOOD POINTS

- Good temperatures on 'mid' setting.
- Good temperature uniformity within compartments.
- Handles external temperature changes well.
- Very fast fresh-food cooling.
- Electronic temperature management, with good pushbutton controls.
- Controls allow a good range of temperature combinations between fridge and freezer.
- Good storage versatility.
- An alarm sounds when doors are left open or a fault is detected.

BAD POINTS

- Moderate temperature fluctuations as the compressor stops and starts.
- The crisper's sealing lid, which is vital for maintaining humidity, can easily move sideways, in which case the crisper won't keep vegies as fresh. (The manufacturer tells us it's addressed this concern with a new crisper design that fridges will have from May 2005.)
- No chiller compartment.

Profiles are continued overleaf

Profiles of new models in the *What to buy* list, continued

PROFILES: GEOFF AMBLER

376–450 L (continued)

FISHER & PAYKEL TASMAN E442B

Price: $1399

Glass shelves in the fridge and wire baskets in the bottom-mounted freezer.

GOOD POINTS

- Good temperatures on 'mid' setting.
- Handles external temperature changes very well.
- Electronic temperature management, with good pushbutton controls.
- Very good crisper humidity.
- Controls allow a good range of temperature combinations between fridge and freezer.
- Good storage versatility.
- An alarm sounds when doors are left open or a fault is detected.

BAD POINTS

- The door bottle shelf is a little warm compared with the compartment average.
- Some temperature variation within the freezer.
- Crispers have a cold spot where vegetables could freeze. (See the E440T profile, page 41.)
- No chiller compartment.

451–525 L

FISHER & PAYKEL ELEGANCE E521T

Price: $1549 BEST BUY

Glass shelves and a wire bottle rack in the fridge, and wire racks in the relatively small top-mounted freezer.

GOOD POINTS

- Very good temperatures on 'mid' setting.
- Good temperature uniformity within compartments.
- Handles external temperature changes well.
- Maintains steady temperatures as the compressor stops and starts.
- Fast fresh-food cooling.
- Electronic temperature management, with good pushbutton controls.
- Very good crisper humidity.
- Controls allow a good range of temperature combinations between fridge and freezer.
- Good storage versatility.
- An alarm sounds when doors are left open or a fault is detected.

BAD POINTS

- No chiller compartment.

ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR NB510J

Price: $1779

Glass shelves in the fridge and wire baskets in the bottom-mounted freezer.

GOOD POINTS

- Good temperature uniformity within compartments.
- Maintains steady temperatures as the compressor stops and starts.
- Very good crisper humidity.
- Controls allow a very good range of temperature combinations between fridge and freezer.

BAD POINTS

- Fresh-food cool-down time is a bit longer than for most other models in this size range.
- Fresh-food compartment temperature is very warm on the 'mid' settings.
- Fresh-food compartment could get colder in winter, unless the controls are reset.
- The controls aren't electronic and are neither well explained on the fridge itself nor easy to set.
- No chiller compartment.

FISHER & PAYKEL ELEGANCE E522B

Price: $1599

Glass shelves and a wire bottle rack in the fridge, and wire baskets in the bottom-mounted freezer.

GOOD POINTS

- Good temperatures on 'mid' setting.
- Handles external temperature changes very well.
- Electronic temperature management, with good pushbutton controls.
- Very good crisper humidity.
- Controls allow a good range of temperature combinations between fridge and freezer.
- Good storage versatility.
- An alarm sounds when doors are left open or a fault is detected.

BAD POINTS

- Fresh-food cool-down time is a bit longer than for other models in this size range.
- It's difficult to get the freezer extra-cold — it only reached around –19°C.
- Crispers have a cold spot where vegetables could freeze. (See the **E440T** profile, page 41.)
- No chiller compartment.

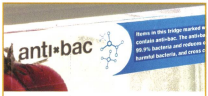
WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

Only four of the newly tested models failed to make it into the *What to buy* list.

- The **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR N300J** is one of the worst of all the fridges in the table (page 44) for temperature management. Its fridge and freezer temperatures are very warm on the 'mid' settings; the range of temperature settings is limited; and its temperature fluctuates significantly when the compressor stops and starts and the seasons change.
- The **SIMPSON SB430C** maintains steady temperatures when the compressor starts and stops. However, it doesn't handle external temperature changes well unless the controls are reset, and they're badly explained on the fridge and difficult to set.
- The electronic temperature management controls work well on the **WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso BJ435V**, but they'll probably need resetting in winter to prevent the fresh-food compartment getting a lot warmer.
- The **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR NB380J** has good temperatures on the 'mid' setting, but takes longer to cool fresh food than other models in its size range. It's also comparatively less energy-efficient and scores lower for crisper freshness than most of them. Also see page 40 for problems with its controls.

LOADS OF SHOPPING?

If you often put lots of shopping in the fridge at the same time, check in the table (Cooling time) how fast the fridges cool down a load — times vary considerably.


anti-bac
Items in this fridge marked w
contain anti-bac. The antivirus
99.9% bacteria and reduces
harmful bacteria, and cross c

GEOFF ANGELER

FIGHTING GERMS

The plastic surfaces of the 'deli bin', upper door shelves, dairy compartments and crisper bin(s) of the **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR** fridges contain an antimicrobial formulation, called 'anti+bac', which is claimed to inhibit the growth of bacteria on treated surfaces for the life of the fridge. These surfaces contain Microban, an antibacterial pesticide with the active ingredient triclosan, registered by the US EPA to inhibit bacterial growth in plastic. But it doesn't protect *you* from food-borne illness (just the plastic), and neither is it a substitute for good hygiene practices — you still have to clean your fridge. According to **ELECTROLUX**, it's just meant to keep it "cleaner between cleanings".

For people with a disability

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre (NSW) assessed the fridges in our latest test to see which are better for people with various disabilities. We've combined her findings with those of previous tests to give you this update.

- For wheelchair users, a bottom-mounted freezer generally makes both it and the fresh-food compartment easier to use. Of the newly tested fridges, the **SIMPSON SB430C** (one of the 10 in the table with a bottom-mounted freezer) is highly recommended for wheelchair users.
- If you have upper limb dysfunction, the **FISHER & PAYKEL** fridges with a bottom-mounted freezer would be most suitable or, if you prefer the freezer on top, the **WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V** or **Virtuoso RJ395V**.
- People with poor vision need good lighting and controls that are easy to read. The **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR NB380J** and **NB510J** (both with a bottom-mounted freezer) are recommended and, with the freezer on top, the **WESTINGHOUSE RJ282V, RJ302V, Virtuoso RJ395V, Virtuoso RJ425V** and **Virtuoso RJ525V**.
- Someone with a cognitive impairment would find the newly tested **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR** models with their conventional controls and the **SIMPSON SB430C** easier to use; or, from previous tests, the **WESTINGHOUSE RJ212T, RJ362V, RJ422V, RJ442V** and **RJ522V**.

(Not all of the models mentioned above are in the *What to buy* list as a generally good fridge — check the table for their scores.)

Brand / model (in rank order within sizes)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)*	2 Ease of use score (%)	3 Temperature performance score (%)*	4 Energy efficiency score (%)	5 Crisper freshness score (%)	6 Cooling score (%)	6 Cooling time (hr:min)	7 Claimed / measured energy use (kWh / year)	
200–299 L									
WESTINGHOUSE RJ282V	72	70	66	85	86	63	5:44	413 / 417	4
WHIRLPOOL Metro 27 **(A) (B)**	59	67	64	68	12	48	6:57	537 / 543	4
MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC MR255J **(C)**	58	65	63	59	35	45	7:20	587 / 615	3
WESTINGHOUSE RJ212T **(D)**	48	67	33	45	52	65	6:18	593 / 679	3
300–375 L									
# **FISHER & PAYKEL** Elegance E372B **(E)**	76	73	74	84	95	62	5:18	498 / 481	3
# **SAMSUNG** Cool n' Cool SRL316NW **(F)**	74	71	71	85	71	70	4:58	465 / 447	3
WESTINGHOUSE RJ362V	71	70	64	82	84	67	5:02	439 / 493	3
WESTINGHOUSE RJ302V	65	73	50	82	84	64	5:34	424 / 451	4
# **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR** N300J	61	70	40	81	77	69	5:09	424 / 464	4
376–450 L									
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ425V **(G)**	80	76	81	82	84	80	3:44	468 / 523	3
# **FISHER & PAYKEL** Elegance E440T **(E)**	78	76	73	92	73	82	3:33	476 / 437	3
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ395V **(H)**	78	73	80	79	82	75	4:14	466 / 530	3
# **FISHER & PAYKEL** Tasman E442B **(E)**	76	76	72	84	92	68	4:40	583 / 527	3
WESTINGHOUSE RJ422V	75	73	71	86	80	69	4:39	455 / 477	3
# **SIMPSON** SB430C	73	70	72	82	81	64	5:02	565 / 537	3
WESTINGHOUSE RJ442V	73	73	66	85	83	69	4:37	486 / 503	4
# **WESTINGHOUSE** Virtuoso RJ435V **(J)**	72	73	71	77	78	63	5:03	543 / 584	4
# **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR** NB380J	69	67	68	76	76	60	5:26	516 / 559	4
NEC Fresh Multi-Flow FR358	55	64	45	61	46	66	5:04	628 / 682	4
451–525 L									
# **FISHER & PAYKEL** Elegance E521T **(E)**	82	76	80	91	92	78	3:46	508 / 483	3
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RJ525V **(K)**	80	79	82	81	80	77	3:52	507 / 590	3
# **ELECTROLUX KELVINATOR** NB510J **(L)**	75	67	77	80	87	62	4:58	589 / 602	3
# **FISHER & PAYKEL** Elegance E522B **(E)**	75	76	73	82	92	59	5:07	596 / 597	3
WESTINGHOUSE RJ522V	73	76	66	83	80	69	4:28	508 / 569	4
SAMSUNG SR57NXA **(B)**	69	68	73	71	61	60	5:09	697 / 693	3
MORE THAN 525 L									
SAMSUNG Cool Tech Plus SRL550DW **(M)**	73	72	64	88	74	79	3:39	604 / 576	4
JENN-AIR JCB-20-BDS **(B) (N)**	64	61	60	83	95	31	6:44	614 / 627	4
GE Profile PTU527X **(P)**	63	62	66	60	60	61	4:49	904 / 843	3
SIDE-BY-SIDE									
WHIRLPOOL Gold 6GD22DCXHW **(B)**	76	70	76	81	89	66	4:31	790 / 811	4
WESTINGHOUSE Virtuoso RS645V	61	73	57	63	84	35	6:21	1171 / 1048	4

\# *Newly tested models.*

* *In the last test we modified the temperature performance score to better reflect how each fridge performs as the room temperature changes. Results for some fridges may be slightly different from scores published before November 2004.*

** *Measured dimensions include hinges and any protrusions at the back, such as the compressor. They're rounded up to the next centimetre.*

† *Prices are recommended or average retail, provided by manufacturers in February 2005.*

na *Not applicable.*

(A) *Tested model stainless steel; available in white, $799.*

(B) *Discontinued, but may still be available in some stores.*

(C) *Available in stainless steel, MR255J-ST, $925.*

(D) *Available in stainless steel, RJ213T, $889.*

(E) *The manufacturer told us there'll be cosmetic changes in May (in September for the E372B) — a glass shelf in the freezer and a crisper drawer on rails rather than sitting on the fridge floor — but they're unlikely to affect performance scores. Most Fisher & Paykel fridges come in four price and style ranges: Tasman, Elegance (which have minor cosmetic differences between them), Inox (brushed stainless steel) and Iridium (fingerprint-resistant stainless steel).*

(F) *Similar model available with platinum finish, SRL316NP, for $1199.*

(G) *Available in stainless steel, RJ423, $1669.*

(H) *Available in stainless steel, RJ393, $1459.*

(I) *Available in stainless steel, BJ433V, $2089.*

(K) *Available in stainless steel, RJ523V, $2249.*

(L) *Available in stainless steel, NB510SJ, $2139.*

(M) *Available in pewter finish, SRL551DP, $2199.*

(N) *Available in aluminium with co-ordinated handles, $4599; with integrated handles, trim kit and stainless steel panels, $3999; and integrated handles, trim kit, ready to receive custom panels, $4999.*

(P) *Only available with a stainless steel finish.*

(Q) *With temperature control.*

(S) *With a kit.*

(T) *Except with stainless steel trim kit.*

URES			SPECIFICATIONS									COSTS	
Crisper drawers	Dairy	Remove shelves with door at 90°	9 Door hinge position	Freezer location	Measured dimensions (cm, H x W x D)**	10 Claimed total volume (L)	10 Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	10 Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	11 10-year running costs ($)	Price ($)†
1	✓		R or L	Top	155 x 61 x 65	284	209	75	2	Australia	Electrolux	626	829
1			Rev	Top	169 x 56 x 63	269	205	66	2	India	Whirlpool	815	899
1		✓	R	Top	158 x 56 x 62	255	179	76	5	Thailand	Mitsubishi Electric	923	759
1			R or L	Top	139 x 51 x 60	218	168	50	2	Australia	Electrolux	1019	599
2	✓		R or L	Bottom	161 x 64 x 70	373	250	123	2	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	722	1299
1			R	Bottom	178 x 60 x 66	316	199	117	2	China	Samsung	671	999
1	✓		R or L	Top	164 x 70 x 65	364	273	91	2	Australia	Electrolux	740	1099
1	✓		R or L	Top	163 x 61 x 65	302	228	75	2	Australia	Electrolux	677	889
1	✓		R or L	Top	162 x 61 x 65	303	228	75	2	Australia	Electrolux	696	889
1	✓		R or L	Top	164 x 70 x 71	416	313	103	2	Australia	Electrolux	785	1409
1	✓		R or L	Top	161 x 69 x 70	447	342	105	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	656	1399
1	✓		R or L	Top	172 x 70 x 65	393	302	91	2	Australia	Electrolux	795	1309
2	✓		Rev **(S)**	Bottom	170 x 67 x 71	442	307	135	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	791	1399
1	✓		R or L	Top	164 x 70 x 71	416	313	103	2	Australia	Electrolux	716	1249
1	✓		R or L	Bottom	172 x 71 x 71	431	300	131	2	Australia	Electrolux	806	1459
1	✓		R or L	Top	172 x 70 x 71	442	339	103	2	Australia	Electrolux	755	1459
1	✓		R or L	Bottom	172 x 71 x 71	431	300	131	2	Australia	Electrolux	876	1669
1	✓		R or L	Bottom	172 x 71 x 65	381	267	114	2	Australia	Electrolux	839	1249
1			R	Top	173 x 67 x 64	358	260	98	2	Korea	NEC	1023	799
2	✓		R or L	Top	170 x 80 x 71	517	400	117	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	725	1549
2	✓		R or L	Top	172 x 80 x 71	517	396	121	2	Australia	Electrolux	885	1929
2	✓		R or L	Bottom	172 x 81 x 71	505	349	156	2	Australia	Electrolux	903	1779
2	✓		R or L	Bottom	170 x 80 x 71	519	360	159	2	Australia	Fisher & Paykel	896	1599
2	✓		R or L	Top	172 x 80 x 71	517	396	121	2	Australia	Electrolux	854	1779
1			R	Top	182 x 75 x 73	495	349	146	2	Korea	Samsung	1040	1199
1			R	Bottom	180 x 83 x 73	551	361	190	2	Korea	Samsung	864	1999
Q) 2	✓	✓	Rev **(T)**	Bottom	179 x 91 x 68	596	411	185	5	USA	Jenn-air / Sampford	941	4299
1			R	Top	171 x 76 x 73	527	368	160	2	Taiwan	Kleenmaid	1265	2499
Q) 1	✓		na	LH side	170 x 84 x 83	644	419	225	2	USA	Whirlpool	1217	3799
Q) 1	✓		na	LH side	172 x 98 x 72	643	407	236	2	Australia	Electrolux	1572	3869

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on performance and ease of use, weighted as follows:

- Ease of use: 20%
- Temperature performance: 40%
- Energy efficiency: 20%
- Crisper freshness: 8%
- Cooling: 12%

Notes 2–6

Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and click on any of the articles under 'Fridges' in the index to see what we tested and measured for these scores (under *Our test*), or see the article in November 2002.

7 Claimed / measured energy use

The claimed amount of electricity used over one year of normal operation, vs that calculated from our measurements. Most measurements are quite close to the claims, although five **WESTINGHOUSE** models were more than 10% higher.

8 Noise level

We measured the noise level of each fridge from 1 m distance during normal running; more noise is produced when the compressor starts up and also during the defrost cycle. The design of your kitchen and the fridge's location also make a difference to what you'll hear, and modern frost-free fridges make pops and clicks, gurgling, hissing and cracking sounds that can be quite loud.

9 Door hinge position

R = on the right; L = on the left; rev = reversible. While you can reverse the door yourself on some models, manufacturers often recommend a service call.

10 Claimed volume

The claimed volume tells you approximately how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage. Use the volume to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh-food compartment, so you can choose a fridge that meets your storage needs.

11 10-year running costs

These are calculated at a rate of 15 cents per kWh. Ten years are a useful indication of the long-term difference between high and low energy usage — and you should be able to expect your fridge to last at least that long.

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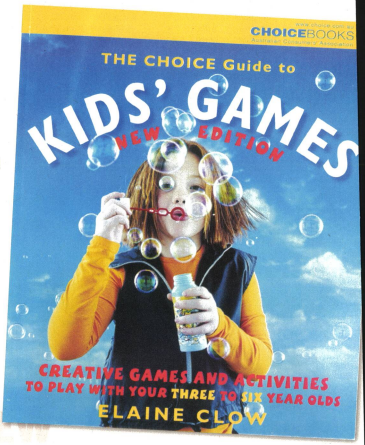
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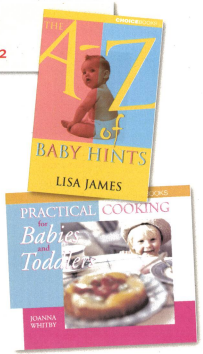

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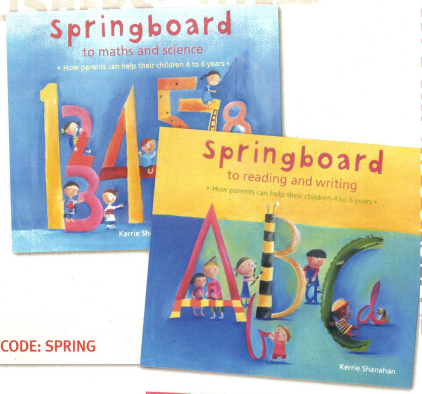
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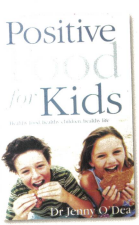

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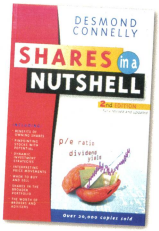

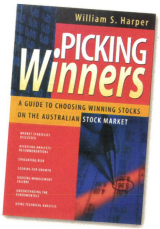

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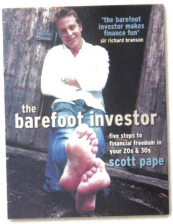
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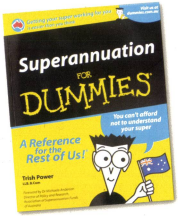

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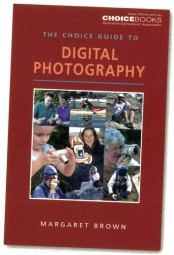

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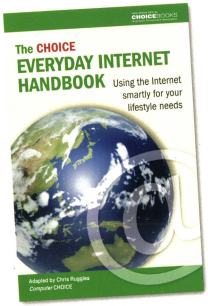

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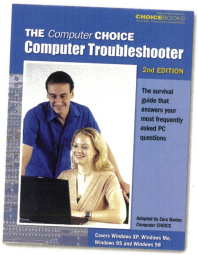
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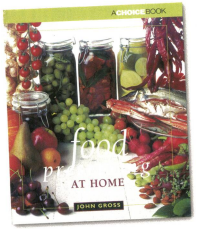

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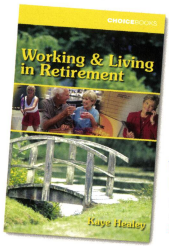

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Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Federal Treasury website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Consumer Safety Unit on (02) 6263 2747.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

FOOD: Baiada Poultry has recalled **Baiada Select Poultry Cooked and Diced Chicken Breast**, frozen ready to eat, 5 kg carton of five 1 kg plastic packets, with a use-by date of December 7, 2005, and distributed in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and WA.
The problem: It may contain metal fragments.
What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1300 725 071 for more information.

FOOD: Haigh's has recalled **Haigh's Scorched Almond block**, 200 g and 500 g in broken pieces and packaged in clear cellophane packs, with a use-by date of 12/06/05, batch code 1412123 and sold in South Australia and Victoria.
The problem: It may contain metal fragments.
What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to any Haigh's store for a refund, or post to Haigh's Manufacturing, 153 Greenhill Road, Parkside 5063, for a refund of both product and postage. For more information call (08) 8372 7000 or after hours call 0401 679 851.

FOOD: Woolworths has recalled **Woolworths Regular Beef mince, Premium Beef mince, Heart Smart Beef mince, minced lamb** and **minced pork**, packed in random weights, with use-by dates of 07.02.05 and 08.02.05 and sold at Woolworths Paralowie supermarket in South Australia only on Saturday February 5 and Sunday February 6, 2005.
The problem: It may contain metal fragments.
What to do: Don't eat it. Check your freezer for any affected mince. Return it to the nearest Woolworths store for a refund, or call 1800 638 434 for more information.

FOOD: MasterFoods has recalled the following **Mars fundraising boxes: M&M's Milk Chocolate Speckled Eggs** 195 g; **M&M's Peanut Speckled Eggs** 195 g; and **M&M's Crispy Speckled Eggs** 165 g. Each box contains 18 individual eggs, with a best-before date of 21/07/05, lot codes R325, R326, R327, R329, R330, R335 and R336.
The problem: The wrong product may have been packed in the boxes, and poses a risk to people who have an allergy to peanuts.
What to do: Don't eat them if you have a peanut allergy. Return the empty box, including the production code and best-before date, to MasterFoods Australia New Zealand, PO Box 633, Ballarat 3350, to receive a refund, or call 1800 245 455 for more information.

FOOD: Coles has recalled **Coles Parmagiana Beef Rissoles**, packaged as **beef burger patties**, in a black tray with clear thin wrap, best-before date 27/02/2005, batch code 4.
The problem: The product is incorrectly labelled and contains undeclared allergens including milk products, gluten and possibly egg.
What to do: If you froze it for later use, don't eat it if you have an allergy to milk, gluten or egg. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund or call 1800 061 562 for more information.

PAINT: ITW Polymers and Fluids has recalled **Galmet DuraGal Silver Paint**, 350 g aerosol can, batch number S5029154, which can be found on the top of the can after removing the cap. Cans have been on sale since January 25, 2005.
The problem: The can could rupture at the junction of the valve and can top.
What to do: To check the batch number, face the can away from you and in a safe direction. Don't shake it. Place cans with the affected batch number in a sealed container and return them to the place of purchase for a refund. For more information call 1800 063 511.

CLOTHING: Funtastic has recalled **Spider Man** and **Hot Wheels rash vests**. The Hot Wheels vest has either a navy blue body with cobalt-blue sleeves or a black body with red sleeves, and can be identified by the keycode 4918-45 and style number BLT 4141, which is printed below the care instruction label sewn into the back of the neck. The Spider Man vest has a red main body with blue on the underside of the sleeve and down each side of the body, and has keycode 4918-52 and style number BLT 4446. They were sold at Best & Less stores between 1/10/2004 and 11/2/2005.
The problem: They don't provide the 50+ UPF rating as marked.
What to do: Stop wearing them. Return them to the nearest Best & Less store for a refund, or call 1800 244 543 for more information.

TOY: Austwide Wholesalers has recalled **Intelligence Funny Toys, Clown or Teddy Bear rattle** (TY 2119), a brightly coloured plastic ring about 10 cm in diameter with either a multi-coloured bear or a clown suspended in the centre. They were distributed between 2003 and 2005 through discount/variety stores.
The problem: The rattle doesn't meet the required standard and poses a choking hazard to young children.
What to do: Remove it from the reach of children. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call (08) 9455 3200 for more information.

QUILT/BLANKET: Aussino International has recalled **Aussino 100% Cotton Quilts and Blankets**, manufactured between February and October 2004.
The problem: The quilts and blankets are incorrectly labelled as being 100% cotton. They contain 7% polyester and, in the blanket, traces of rayon fibre. The care instructions on the packaging of the quilt also indicate that it may be tumble-dried, which may damage it.
What to do: Don't tumble-dry the quilt. Follow the care instructions on the quilt itself rather than the instructions on the packaging. If you're not satisfied with the quilt or blanket, return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 993 010 for more information.

POWER CORD: Microsoft has recalled **Microsoft Xbox power cord**, manufactured before 23/10/2003.
The problem: A component failure may lead to burning inside the console or melting of the power cord attached to the console.
What to do: Check the manufacturing date on the bottom of the console. If it's before 23/10/2003 go to www.xbox.com and click on 'power cord replacement for Xbox' to get a free replacement cord, or call 1800 073 897.

POWER CORD: Abacus Computers and Technology has recalled the **electrical appliance cord set** supplied with some Abacus desktop computer systems between May and November 2004. The cord set can be identified by the words 'Cheng Ho' on the cord, moulded plug or appliance connector.
The problem: The neutral and earthing conductors could be transposed and may become unsafe or dangerous in use.
What to do: Stop using it. Return it to any Abacus outlet for replacement, or call 1300 309 944 for more information.

SIGNALLING DEVICE: PSA Products has recalled the **Lifesaver Visual Signalling Device**, model number SL240, which can be found on the back of the unit. It was manufactured between January 1997 and April 2003.
The problem: It may have a faulty capacitor that may cause the unit to malfunction and not work properly.
What to do: Contact PSA on 1300 655 188 to arrange for a free replacement.

CAR: BMW has recalled the **BMW 5 and 7 series seat occupancy sensor** on models **E60** and **E65/66**, manufactured between 01/07/2003 and 01/06/2004.
The problem: The seat occupancy detectors may be unable to reliably detect that the seat is occupied, and so, on both models, the front passenger seat and side airbags and front seatbelt tensioner and, on the E65/66, the driver's belt tensioner, may not be activated when required.
What to do: Contact the nearest BMW dealer to arrange an inspection and repair if required, or call 1800 813 299 for more information.

BICYCLE: Shimano has recalled **Shimano bicycle inner brake cables** for road/racing bikes only. Cables fitted as original equipment on bicycles aren't affected, and neither are cables used on other styles of bike.
The problem: The cable may become detached.
What to do: Stop riding the affected bicycle immediately and take it to a bicycle shop for verification.

aboutchoice

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index

HOW TO USE THIS INDEX
Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.
* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.

Acne treatments **Aug**, Jan/Feb*
Advertising drugs Jun
Air conditioners, split-system, including inverters **Oct**
Antivirus software **Jul**
Appliance reliability **Aug**

Baby
food **Jul**
monitors **Aug**
Bandaids **Jul**
Barbecues, gas, trolley/portable **Dec**
Batteries, rechargeable, AA **Mar**
Blood pressure monitors **May**
Breakfast cereals **Mar**
Breakfasts, quick **Sep**
Butter and spreads **Jan/Feb**

Camcorders, digital **Jan/Feb**
Cameras
digital **Oct**, Dec*, **Apr**
paper costs, printing photos **Oct**
Cars
ANCAP crash tests **Oct**
hybrid petrol/electric cars Apr
key replacement costs Sep
lemon laws Sep
reader reviews Jul, Aug, Mar, Apr
used car safety Dec
waterless car cleaners **Mar**
Cashew nuts **Dec**
Cereals, breakfast **Mar**
Champagne and sparkling wine **Dec**
Child/baby concerns
baby food **Jul**
baby monitors **Aug**
cots **Jan/Feb**
lunches and snacks **Jan/Feb**
tipping stove Nov, Jan/Feb*
Cleaners
car, waterless **Mar**
laundry detergents **May**
mitts **Apr**
multipurpose **Oct**
steam **Apr**
Clothes dryers **Apr**
Cockroach killers **Dec**
Coffee
chains (coffee and cakes) **May**
espresso machines **Aug**
grinders **Aug**
pre-ground for plungers **Jul**
Column heaters **Jun**
Cooktops, buying guide Oct
Cordless drills, cheap **Apr**
Cordless phones **Apr**
Corporate social responsibility, GSM mobile phones Jun
Cots **Jan/Feb**

Detergents, laundry **May**
Digital camcorders **Jan/Feb**
Digital cameras **Oct**, Dec*, **Apr**
Dishwashers **Jul, Jan/Feb**
Doors, security screen Mar
Drills, cheap cordless **Apr**
Drugs, advertising Jun
Dryers, clothes **Apr**
DVD and hard disk recorders **Jun**

Eggs **Sep**
Electric shavers **Nov**, Jan/Feb*
Electric toothbrushes **Sep**
Electricity, costs and supply Mar
Energy labelling Sep
Espresso machines **Aug**
Ethical manufacture, GSM mobile phones Jun

Fish, misnaming Jul
Flooring guide, timber Dec
Food
baby food **Jul**
breakfast cereals **Mar**
breakfasts, quick **Sep**
butter and spreads **Jan/Feb**
children's lunches and snacks **Jan/Feb**
coffee shop chains **May**
eggs **Sep**
fish, misnaming Jul
folate Nov
health claims Jun
honey **May**
juice bars Dec
labelling, quality descriptors Nov
nuts, cashews and mixed **Dec**
olive oil **Aug**
olives **Jul**
organic processed foods Oct
spreads and butter **Jan/Feb**
storage, disposable **Jan/Feb**
trans fat **Apr**
Folate, eating enough Nov
Fridges
200–299 L **Jun**
energy-efficient, mixed sizes **Nov, May**
Frypans, non-stick **Nov**

Glamour photography Apr
Greywater, reusing Nov, Mar*
Gyms **Jul**

Hard disk and DVD recorders **Jun**
Health
acne treatments Aug
blood pressure monitors **May**
claims on food labels Jun
drug advertising Jun
hospital insurance **Sep**
magnet therapy Sep
mobile phones, EMR Jun, Sep*
pedometers **Oct**, Dec*
St John's wort May
Heaters
column **Jun**
outdoor, gas **Mar**
Home theatre systems **Dec**
Home warranty insurance Aug
Honey **May**
Hospital insurance **Sep, May***
Hybrid (petrol/electric) cars Apr

Index, four-year Jun
Indoor paint **Dec**
Insurance
home warranty Aug
hospital **Sep, May***
travel **Dec**
Internet/phone/TV packages Aug
Internet, wireless Nov
Irons, steam stations **Jul**

Juice bars Dec

Knives, 20 cm cook's **Jun**

Labelling
energy Sep
food Nov
health claims on food Jun
Laundry detergents **May**
Lawnmowers, battery and electric **Nov**
Lemon laws (cars) Sep

Magnet therapy Sep
Manufacture, ethical, GSM mobile phones Jun
Mattresses, buying guide Oct
Mitts, cleaning **Apr**
Mixed nuts **Dec**
Mobile phones
GSM **Jun, Jan/Feb**
safety and EMR Jun, Sep*
Money — see Financial
Monitors, baby **Aug**
Multifunction printers **May**
Multipurpose cleaners **Oct**

Non-stick frypans **Nov**
Nuts, cashews and mixed **Dec**

Olive oil **Aug**
Olives **Jul**
Organic processed foods Oct
Outdoor gas heaters **Mar**
Ovens, wall, electric multifunction **Jul**

Paint, indoor **Dec**
Paper costs, printing photos **Oct**
Pay TV Mar
Pedometers **Oct**, Dec*
Pharmaceuticals, advertising Jun
Pharmacies, advice given **Sep,** May*
Phone/internet/TV packages Aug
Phones
cordless **Apr**
mobile — see Mobile phones
phoning home from overseas Sep, Dec*
VoIP calls Apr
Photography, glamour Apr
Plunger coffee, pre-ground **Jul**
Pool fences **Sep**
Printers, multifunction **May**

Rainwater tanks Nov, Mar*
Rechargeable batteries, AA **Mar**
Refrigerators — see Fridges
Reliability, appliances **Aug**
Rice cookers **Mar**

Security screen doors Mar
Shavers, electric **Nov**, Jan/Feb*
Snacks for children **Jan/Feb**
Sparkling wine and champagne **Dec**
Spreads and butter **Jan/Feb**
St John's wort May
Steam cleaners **Apr**
Steam stations **Jul**
Storage, food, disposable **Jan/Feb**
Stove, tipping Nov, Jan/Feb*

Telephones — see Phones
Television
51 cm **May**
76 cm, widescreen **Oct**, Jan/Feb*
pay TV Mar
toppling TVs Oct, Mar*
Timber flooring guide Dec
Toothbrushes, electric **Sep**
Toothpaste, whitening **Jan/Feb**
Trans fat **Apr**
Travel insurance **Dec**
TV/phone/internet packages Aug

Vacuum cleaners **Aug**
Video equipment
DVD and hard disk recorders **Jun**
home theatre systems **Dec**
VoIP phone calls Apr

Washer-dryers **Mar,** Apr*
Washing machines **Sep,** Oct*, Jan/Feb*
Washing powder **May**
Water
greywater, reusing Nov, Mar*
rainwater tanks Nov, Mar*
Waterless car cleaners **Mar**
Whitening toothpaste **Jan/Feb**
Wine, sparkling and champagne **Dec**
Wireless internet Nov

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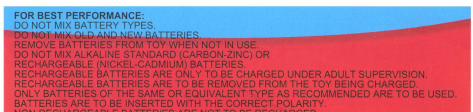
Shell pool/Sand pit
Versatile sand pit or wading pool
Pool capacity 72 litres at 60% full
Lid may be used as cover
Accessories not included
AGES 3 YEARS & UP
EMPTY AND STORE SAFELY WHEN N
CHILDREN AGES 1-6 YEARS. MADE

Intended for children 1–6 years ...

... unless they're under three?

Because you're more likely to trip over something?

We're stumped — this one's just plain weird.


FOR BEST PERFORMANCE:
DO NOT MIX BATTERY TYPES.
DO NOT MIX OLD AND NEW BATTERIES.
REMOVE BATTERIES FROM TOY WHEN NOT IN USE.
DO NOT MIX ALKALINE STANDARD (CARBON-ZINC) OR
RECHARGEABLE (NICKEL-CADMIUM) BATTERIES.
RECHARGEABLE BATTERIES ARE ONLY TO BE CHARGED UNDER ADULT SUPERVISION.
RECHARGEABLE BATTERIES ARE TO BE REMOVED FROM THE TOY BEING CHARGED.
ONLY BATTERIES OF THE SAME OR EQUIVALENT TYPE AS RECOMMENDED ARE TO BE USED.
BATTERIES ARE TO BE INSERTED WITH THE CORRECT POLARITY.
NON-RECHARGEABLE BATTERIES ARE NOT TO BE RECHARGED.
DIFFERENT TYPES OF BATTERIES OR NEW AND USED BATTERIES ARE NOT TO BE MIXED.
EXHAUSTED BATTERIES ARE TO BE REMOVED FROM THE TOY.
THE SUPPLY TERMINALS ARE NOT TO BE SHORT-CIRCUITED.
KEEP PACKAGING FOR REFERENCE SINCE CONTAIN IMPORTANT INFORMATION.
CAUTION: NOT SUITABLE TO USE RECHARGEABLE BATTERY

Considering all the whats and wherefores given about using rechargeable batteries in this toy, it comes as a surprise that in fact they're not suitable to be used at all.

SERVING IT UP

Why is one serve of regular **DIET COKE** 200 mL, whereas for **DIET COKE** with vanilla it's 390 mL (the whole bottle)? Is it so they can claim "less than 1 Calorie per serve" for the former? Or because they got realistic and recognised that most people will drink the whole 390 mL bottle, not just 200 mL of it? Would it be a diet disaster if you drank the whole bottle of regular **DIET COKE** and consumed (shock! horror!) around 1.4 Calories?

$10 tickets online
- limited time only!
Purchase any ticket online for only $10 per ticket*. Valid from January 20 to March 23, 2005.
*$1 booking fee applies per ticket
Book online - get a seat every time!
SO REALLY, THEY'RE $11 TICKETS ...

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The prize for the best entry goes to K Nicholson. Thanks also to L Roberts, S Powell, G Archer, J Copeland and T Neve for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.